Amateur
GARDENING

14th June, 2025 ESTD 1884

WILDLIFE GARDENING SPECIAL

HOW TO CREATE A POLLINATOR PARADISE

Nick Hamilton

4 WAYS TO HELP GARDEN BIRDS

With *AG*'s
Toby Buckland

ORGANIC HOUSEPLANT CARE TIPS

RUTH HAYES

4 MORE IDEAS!

1 Explore making rose potpourri with Anne Swithinbank

2 Find out how to grow your own spices with Barbara Segall

3 Get growing delicious Asian greens with Lucy Chamberlain's advice

4 Learn about the many uses for weeds with Garden Organic's tips

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From dreamy summer borders to radiant longer-lasting roses, the best begonias, plants for sensational seating areas, and more...

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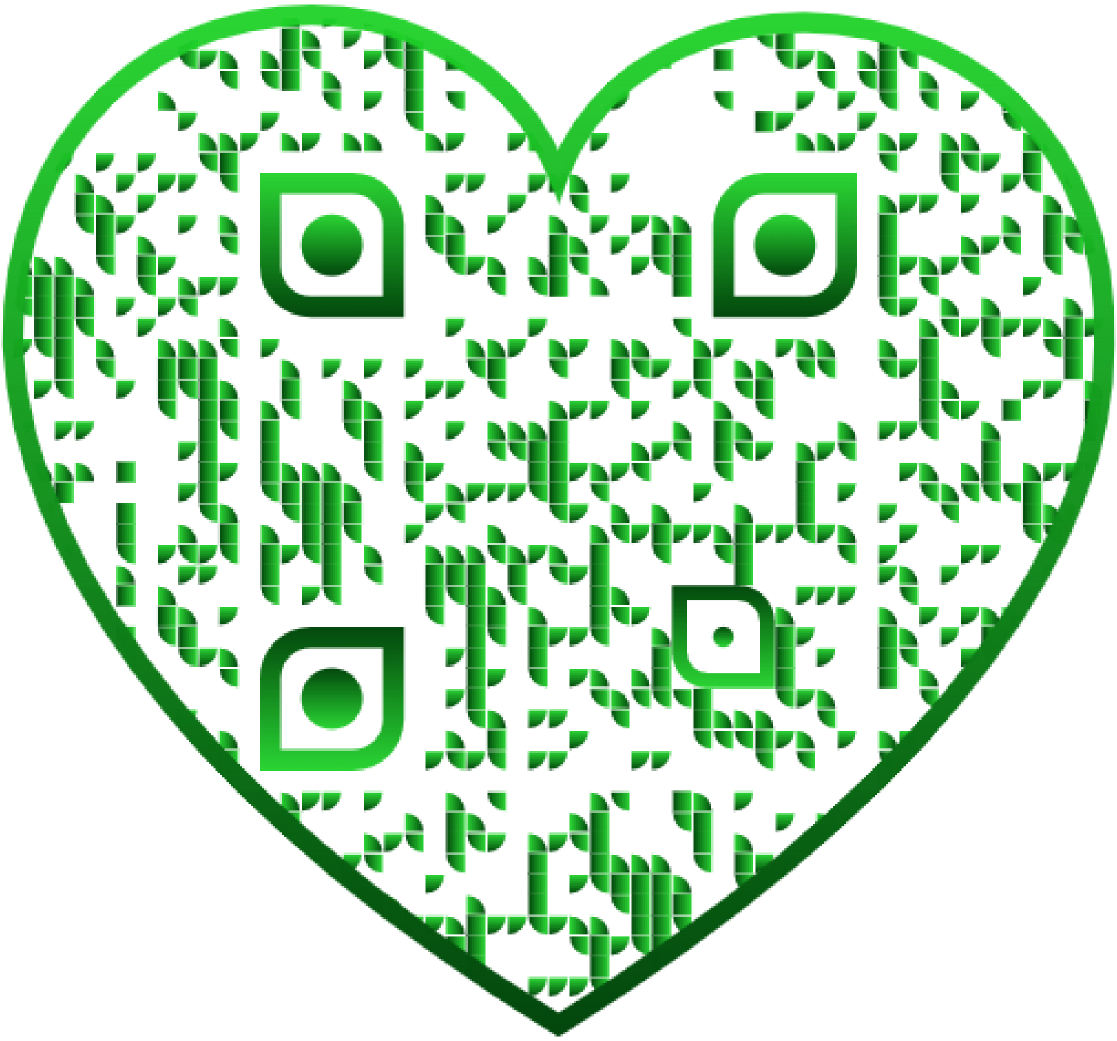

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A warm welcome

Getting it right

Every gardening year is different, every garden is different and then we have changeable weather to add to the mix. The spring just gone was undoubtedly glorious, with day upon day of sunshine to bask in as we energetically sowed the seeds of the flowers and edibles for the year ahead.

Then we had the rain and the slugs started to emerge - and goodness knows what we'll get next. Being prepared for anything is always important, as is knowing when to change the way we normally do things to work with the weather and circumstances at hand. A lot of gardeners experienced slightly frazzled seedlings this spring, so potting on or out that bit earlier, with some protection if needed, has been an essential element in the 'hardening off' process this year. Deep watering and then mulching was also the order of the day to help plants cope with the extra early heat as they spread their roots and leaves to get robustly established in their beds and borders.

There is not a 'one size fits all' approach to gardening, or to life in general, and knowing when something needs changing, rethinking or doing again because of the weather, or something else, is how we learn and grow. So, as you'll read in this issue's news pages, our approach to live events is being revised. We always try to listen to you, our dear readers, and it's so important for us to get things right for you: we are now in the process of organising a series of live partnership events and appearances around the UK so that we can meet many more of you closer to where you live.

This approach of 'don't come to us, we'll come to you' fits perfectly with the friendly face of the magazine and our array of fantastic experts. This does mean our National Amateur Gardening Show in Sussex has been postponed for this year, for which we wholeheartedly apologise, but please know that we are coming back with a bigger programme which will be more of a series of roadshow events.

It is so important for us to get this right for you and to be as accessible as possible, for *AG* readers old and new, and so that's what we are going to do.

We are so grateful for the many emails and letters from readers with thoughts and ideas about live events closer to where they live. Please keep sending them in, because the more we hear from you the better, and the easier it will be for us to shape what you would like to see. There will be more news about this coming soon - watch this space!

In this issue our merry band of brilliant expert *AG* contributors include Ruth Hayes, Bob Flowerdew, Graham Clarke, Barbara Segall , Anne Swithinbank, Lucy Chamberlain, Michael Perry, John Negus, Mike Palmer, Stephanie Hafferty, Liz Zorab, Nick Hamilton, Garden Organic, Rosie Irving, Kim O'Brien and Toby Buckland.

We hope you enjoy everything we have put together for you.

Please keep writing in. I love receiving your ideas, letters, questions, musings and poems. The spirit of *AG* continues rejuvenated, working towards a brighter green future for us all, together.

Kim x

Kim Stoddart *AG*'s editor-in-chief

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28 June 2025

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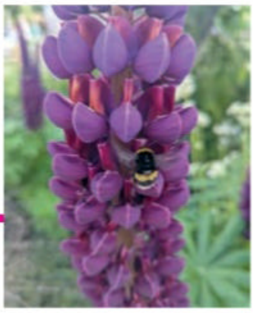
Your NEWS FORTNIGHT

Bringing you some of the gardening news highlights



Research suggests buzzing sounds encourage plants to make more pollen

New community garden revives neglected allotment

The new plot aims to help its village 'educate, share and grow'

Exminster Community Garden

Exminster Community Garden was started in January 2025 and is already thriving

A village community garden has breathed new life into an underused and overgrown church allotment site.

Exminster Community Garden near Exeter in Devon came into being earlier this year with the aim of bringing the community together to 'educate, share and grow'.

Jeremy Pyne, who helped establish the garden, said: "The first stage was to explore the idea of a community garden with the Parish Church Council and the Crediton Church Corporation.

"They in turn kindly gave us the go ahead to begin work on a trial plot, rent free."

Work began at the start of January this year and a core team of half a dozen people quickly formed and got stuck in to clear the ground, lay out beds and prepare the site for planting.

The community garden runs with an organic ethos, without the use of pesticides, artificial fertilisers or peat, and aims to promote healthy living and wellbeing as well as being a safe haven for wildlife.

The next steps will be to work with a charitable organisation to put in place a framework of safeguarding and health and safety policies, provide access to a bank account and build a basic infrastructure including efficient water collection and storage.

Jeremy added: "The site is open to all, providing a warm welcome and safe space to everyone. We like to share our skills, knowledge and produce with volunteers and the wider community.

"It's been a really encouraging first few months and we look forward to growing and sharing what we hope will become a thriving part of the community."

Research has scientists buzzing

The buzzing sound made by bees in flight can encourage plants to serve up more nectar, scientists believe.

"There is growing evidence that both insects and plants can sense and produce, or transmit, vibro-acoustic signals," said Prof Francesca Barbero, a zoologist at the University of Turin, who led the research.

Investigations suggest that plants are a more active partner in the act of pollination than previously thought.

The behaviour could be a survival strategy that favours giving nectar and sugar to bees over so-called 'nectar robbers' that do not offer plants any reproductive benefits.

New rose names for RSPB

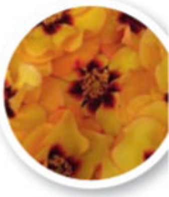
Harkness Roses and the RSPB have joined forces to launch a new RSPB rose.

The new rose variety will be named 'RSPB RazzleBEEdazzle'.

The rose has been selected for its appeal to pollinators.

As the young blooms open they are a deep rich golden-amber, with a dark red spot at the centre of every petal and central yellow stamens. It has a delicate, musky scent.

'RSPB RazzleBEEdazzle' will be launched at RHS Flower Show Wentworth Woodhouse, which runs from July 16 to 20 near Rotherham in Yorkshire.



Right: 'RSPB RazzleBEEdazzle' will be launched in July 2025

Artist workshop to help forge links with plants and nature

A major London art gallery is inviting people to attend an artist-led workshop to 'connect with Earth's plant allies.

Artist Joseph Walsh will be leading the workshop at IMT gallery where participants will study and draw plants and then take part in a rose tea ceremony.

IMT curator Lindsay Friend explained: "We will explore the mysteries of plants through drawing, painting, and meditative observations.

"We'll take a moment to reconnect to our bodies and the living world through a serene rose tea ceremony."

Joseph uses his artwork to forge connections between humans and the natural world.

He said: "This workshop is designed for individuals who seek to deepen their connection with nature and explore their creative potential. No prior experience is required - just an open heart and a curious mind.

"While drawing materials will be provided, feel free to bring your own sketchbooks and preferred materials."

The workshop is on Tuesday, July 8 between 7pm and 9pm at IMT Gallery, Unit 2/210 Cambridge Heath Road, London E2 9NQ.

Tickets are available at: eventbrite.co.uk/e/plant-gazing-under-waxing-crescent-moon-tickets-1368471879229

Above: Artwork made at Joseph Walsh's previous workshop at IMT gallery

© Rose-Marie Luk

Many of Team *AG* at this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show

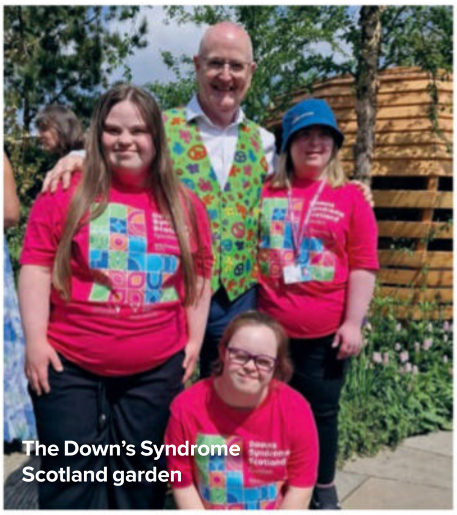
RHS Chelsea Flower Show press day

Many members of Team *AG* were out in force during Press Day at this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show scanning the gardens for ideas and inspiration for the magazine.

Editor and deputy Kim Stoddart and Ruth Hayes were there, as were Lucy Chamberlain, Mike Palmer, Rosie Irving, Michael Perry, Liz Zorab, Stephanie Hafferty, Toby Buckland and Kim O' Brien to name a few.

Everyone agreed that this year the show gardens were 'soft and dreamy', planted with readily available varieties such as irises, foxgloves, lupins, thalictrums and grasses, making the looks easy to replicate at home.

Kim said: "The gardens were gorgeous and graceful this year, they had a dreamy quality with the clever planting combinations and we could happily have sat in some, like the beautiful Down's Syndrome Scotland garden, all the day!"


The Down's Syndrome Scotland garden

AG magazine live events update

It is very important to us that we listen to our readers, businesses and the gardening public at large and so we have taken the very difficult, but carefully considered decision to postpone the National Amateur Gardening Show for this year.

Rest assured live events are very much on the cards and we are in the process of researching and planning what would work best for our readers everywhere.

Amateur Gardening magazine continues to thrive since Kelsey successfully relaunched the magazine, it is a hugely popular magazine with a loyal following and we really want to get this right for you, so we hope you understand. Kim talks about this in more detail on page 3.

We will announce our exciting new live events plans soon.

A summer of events is planned for Blenheim Palace

Palace gardens prepare for a busy summer

A summer of new activities and events have been lined up for Blenheim Palace's gardens.

Alongside the ongoing transformation of the gardens, led by head gardener Andy Mills, visitors can now enjoy walking tours of the formal and walled gardens, painting demonstrations and a striking sculpture exhibition.

The Rosarium boasts 46 new rose varieties this year and the Potager Garden has a display of dahlias as well as a new 'hot border' containing the cannas, hedychiums, bananas, yuccas, salvias, fremontodendrons and myriad other exciting tropical-looking gems.

Andy Mills commented: "There is so much going on at the moment - every visit to Blenheim Palace's gardens offers something new."

For further details of events at the Oxfordshire venue, visit www.blenheimpalace.com.

New nature reserve created in Yorkshire

One of Britain's largest and most nature-deprived cities is set to benefit from the creation of a huge new national nature reserve right on its doorstep.

Bradford Pennine Gateway National Nature Reserve is the latest National Nature Reserve to be created, and the first in West Yorkshire.

Spanning 1,274 hectares, it will provide people with the opportunity to enjoy the landscapes that inspired and were celebrated by the Brontë Sisters in novels such as *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*.

Tony Juniper, Chairman of Natural England, said: "Reversing the historic declines in nature and moving toward ecological recovery requires bigger, better and more joined up areas for nature to thrive. The opening of this reserve is an important moment in this journey."

Right: A view over Baildon Moor in Yorkshire

Are you involved in community growing projects where you live? Send in your news by emailing **editor@amateurgardening.com**

Your GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with AG's gardening expert **Ruth Hayes**

I'm tying in new shoots of our beautiful and deliciously scented Gertrude Jekyll climbing rose
Inset: **Leaf cutter bees have found our roses!**

Keeping roses healthy right through summer

Easy ways to help precious plants thrive without chemicals

One of the things I love best about gardening is that it always has something to teach you - no matter how many green-fingered years you have under your belt.

This was brought home to me this spring when I planted out a couple of young echinaceas I grew from seed last year. They were - still are - robust plants that returned strongly after dying back in winter and I assumed they would thrive in the garden.

They had other ideas! Maybe they weren't ready, maybe the soil was parched after the dry spring, because no matter how much I watered them, their leaves went sad and droopy.

The revived echinaceas in a cold frame

In the end I dug them up again, repotted all the echinaceas in fresh compost and popped them in the cold frame where once again they are thriving. Maybe I'll try again in the autumn, or give them one more winter in the greenhouse.

Mercifully, I'm having less trouble with our roses, which are growing strongly and filling the garden with colour and scent.

Chemical-free disease controls

We've been watering them more than usual because the soil is so dry, even though we're added lots of well-rotted compost and manure to beef it up and help it hold onto moisture.

Last winter I also cleared the beds where the roses grow, and mulched their roots generously, to help prevent fungal diseases such as powdery mildew and black spot.

I don't use chemical sprays, but instead remove and dispose of black spot-affected leaves, collecting any that have already dropped, then adding a layer of mulch to bury disease spores so they can't be splashed back onto the roses when it rains. It doesn't always work but I can tolerate a few black spots if it means having a chemical-free garden.

One of the benefits of not using chemicals is the proliferation of wildlife, particularly insects.

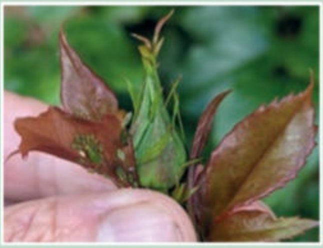
We have several species of solitary bees hanging out in the garden, and one of the most fascinating are the leaf-cutters that nibble notches out of our rose leaves.

They nest in holes, which the female bees line with the pieces of leaf taken from nearby plants. The removal of pieces of leaf doesn't damage the plant or impinge upon its growing potential; in fact it's rather lovely to think of the bees making their homes somewhere around our garden - now what I really want to do is catch them in the act of cutting leaves!

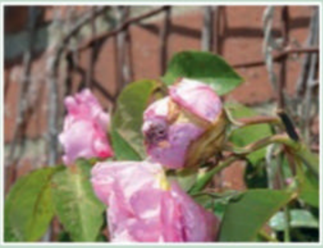
Keeping roses healthy Four tasks to do this summer

1 Remove and bin leaves affected with black spot, including any that have dropped from the plant. Never add them to the compost.

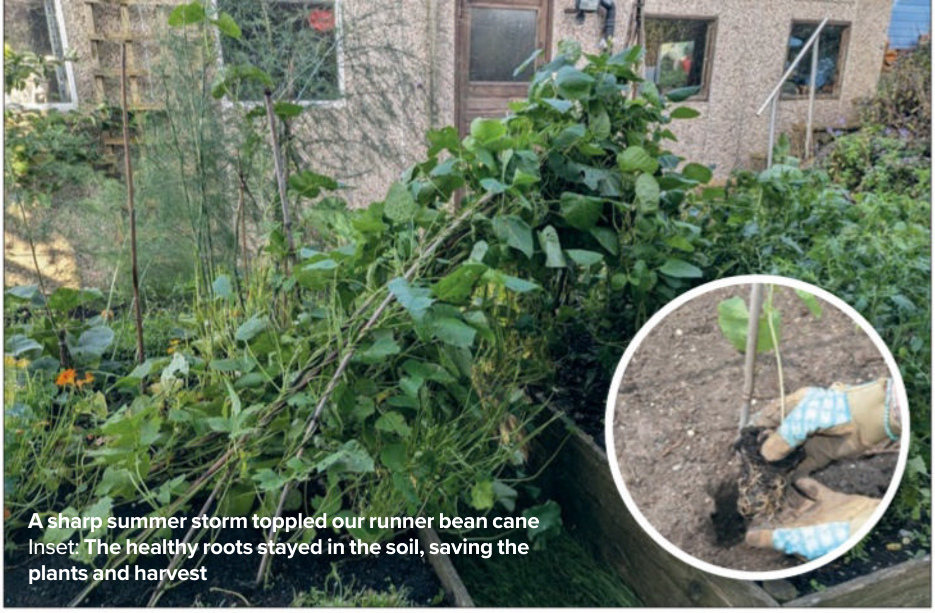
2 Tie in the new growth of climbing and rambling roses to keep them neat and train them in the direction you wish them to grow.



3 Remove aphids before they become an infestation, but leave some for the birds and larvae of ladybirds and hoverflies.



4 Balling is when unopened petals fuse together in wet weather. Good ventilation helps buds dry faster and can lessen the risk.



A sharp summer storm toppled our runner bean cane
Inset: The healthy roots stayed in the soil, saving the plants and harvest

It was almost a case of ‘bean and gone’!

Make sure canes are securely anchored before planting climbing crops

On the previous page I mentioned my mishaps with our adolescent echinaceas, and with a perverse desire to continue with the ‘gardening disaster movie’ theme in this issue, the main photo on this page shows a wee misadventure that befell our runner beans last year.

One summer night we were buffeted by an unseasonably violent storm - and the next morning we discovered that our stand of runner beans had been comprehensively toppled.

It wasn’t the best way to start the day but mercifully the bean plants were still attached to their roots, which had clung on stubbornly to the soil, so we were able to right the canes, anchor them more firmly and go on to have an excellent harvest later on.

Enriching soil before planting in our vegetable raised bed

But, lessons learned and this year the canes have been sunk firmly into the ground by creating deeper holes with a substantial metal crowbar that carries some serious heft, so hopefully they will stay rooted.

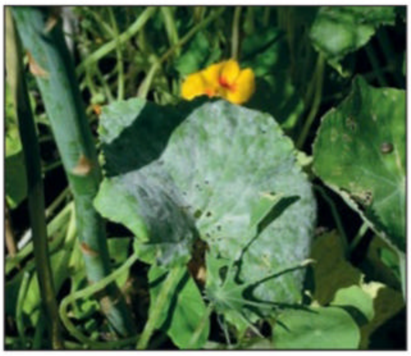
This year the beans went in a little later than usual because the contrariness of the weather made me hesitate before committing myself too early.

It may have been dry and warm, but there were also some chilly nights and cutting winds down here in the south and I didn’t want to risk any losses. Now all we need to do is keep everything crossed that the canes stay in place, and look forward to a harvest that is full of beans.

Good health and hygiene

Feed plants to boost resilience

1 High-potassium liquid tomato feed encourages flowering as well as cropping and is perfect for keeping pots and baskets blooming until well into the autumn. Maintain pest vigilance too, as a container with lots of plants offers hiding places for unwanted visitors.



2 Powdery mildew is a common problem when the soil is dry and airflow restricted, so keep plants well watered and make sure they have lots of room to grow with good ventilation. Cut and bin the worst affected leaves.

Earthing potatoes and June drop in apples

Another veg-related job this week has been earthing up our early and second early potatoes, growing as they are in containers on the patio.

Earthing up is done whether your spuds are in the ground or in pots because by burying the stems, you increase their underground length and encourage them to produce more delicious tubers.

I will keep on earthing up my plants until the containers are full, making sure I feed and water as I go, and then wait until either they finish flowering or the topgrowth (or haulms) die back.

This month is also when the ‘June drop’ takes place, and apple trees shed a quantity of surplus fruits.

This shedding may be unnerving but don’t worry, the trees know what they are doing and enough fruits will be left for a healthy harvest - and a healthy tree that hasn’t been stressed by over-cropping.

The dry start to the spring may contribute to more fruit loss than normal, so make sure trees are well watered.

A lack of nitrogen can also cause excessive fruitlet-drop, so feed with a general purpose fertiliser to rebalance the soil. This is especially important for young trees.

Above: Earth up potatoes as the stems grow to promote a larger harvest
Inset: Apple trees shed surplus fruitlets this month

Giving our winter heather a trim after it has flowered Inset: **Queen bumblebee feasting on the spring flowers**

Trimming back a winter heather

These low-maintenance plants give so much to the garden

The winter heather has successfully completed its first job of the year, which is to produce a mass of flowers to feed the year's first pollinators, including queen bumblebees as they emerge from hibernation.

Every year, usually from January onwards, it puts on a glorious show and by mid-February is reliably a pink buzzing dome as hungry insects flock to it.

Like all heathers, it is exceptionally low-maintenance, and once flowering is done and the vibrant pink turns to a rusty brown, all I need to do is give it a quick trim to keep it in shape.

Last year, for a reason that escapes me now, I forgot to do this but still it thrived and this year's flowers were spectacular.

All I do is remove the tops of the flowered spikes with a pair of shears, avoiding cutting too deeply as this would cut into the older, woody part of the plant which won't regrow.

Once that's done I run my hands over the heather to dislodge the clippings, composting those I can reach and leaving the rest to fall to the soil where they will rot down.

While many heathers prefer acidic soils, our beauty is a winter heath or *Erica carnea* which will tolerate - and in our case thrive in - extremely chalky conditions.

Low-growing, it makes brilliant ground cover and is perfect for wildlife and coastal gardens too.

Now flowering is done, it can continue with the year's other jobs, namely providing shelter for our hedgehogs and then a winter sanctuary, again for the hogs and also for myriad insects and invertebrates.

Organic houseplant care

Keep leaves clean and pest-free

Wiping leaves with a soft damp cloth

- As well as losing myself in the garden this fortnight, I'm giving our houseplants some love.
- They are growing well like their garden brethren and can be similarly beset by pests and diseases in summer.
- Water when the compost feels touch-dry and feed fortnightly with houseplant fertiliser or a general purpose liquid feed.
- Check the leaves for pests - I regularly wipe the leaves them with a soft damp cloth to remove unwanted visitors as well as dust and pollen blown in through open windows.
- Sooty mould is a black sticky substance often found on plants. It develops on honeydew, sweet secretions deposited by sap-sucking pests such as scale insects and is unsightly rather than damaging. Wipe it off and your plant will thrive.
- Move plants towards sunny windowsills but avoid placing them in direct sunlight that can scorch their leaves.
- If any have outgrown their homes and need re-potting, now is the time to do so, while they are growing well. Use peat-free multipurpose compost with a little added grit to improve drainage.

Re-potting and reviving a flagging herb

- Our re-potted and top-dressed herbs all have all been going great guns, apart from the lemon balm.
- I top-dressed it and fed it but no matter how much care and attention I lavished upon it, the plant continued to look sad and wilty.
- Fearing vine weevil grubs, I slipped it from its container and discovered the reason it was failing - it was so pot-bound and the roots so congested (and had completely swallowed the pot crocks) they were unable to do their job of feeding and watering.
- I have now divided it into two and repotted each section in peat-free compost. It was quite a brutal purpose; because the roots were so tangled I had to use a pruning saw to cut through them before trimming away some of their ends.
- But as long as each division has healthy sections of root and top growth they should thrive. I hope so, as I'm looking forward to making some of the lemon balm cordial that Anne Swithinbank talked about in the last issue of *AG*.

Above: **Re-potting our flagging lemon balm after dividing it** Inset: **Cutting through congested plant roots**

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Your GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with **Lucy Chamberlain**, AG's fruit and veg expert

Awesome Asian leaves, sowing into dry soil and keeping squash satisfied

Lucy explains how to make the most of the next few weeks

Lucy recommends growing delicious pak choi, tatsoi and bok choy

We're increasingly looking to grow a wide range of edibles to expand our cooking repertoire and see what might perform well in our evolving climate, and some that I'm really enjoying at the moment are what I call my 'rosette leaves'. Pak choi, tatsoi and bok choy are all derived from *Brassica rapa*, and they develop rosettes of spoon-shaped leaves. They hail from Asia, and can grow at an impressive rate given warmth and moisture. Their enemies are drought stress and chills which can both cause premature flowering, but this can easily be avoided if you grow the crops somewhere semi-shaded during summer (I also grow them in sheltered, warm spots in spring and autumn when my soil is sufficiently damp). Red-leaved varieties seem more prone to bolt for me, but I need to trial more to be certain.

While these leaves can all be eaten raw, they really come into their own when gently cooked – some of my favourite ways to eat them are poached in a light broth, wilted in butter or gently steamed. They can be harvested as a baby crop, or grown to maturity – I do both. Some varieties (e.g. 'Shun Li Choi') are naturally compact so lend themselves well to baby leaf production, others (e.g. 'Tai Sai') are large and vigorous. While you can start early spring sowings under cover in modules, by now soil conditions are warm enough to sow outside. The rosettes can take as little as six weeks to form (for baby leaves) and by sowing short drills every few weeks (see my step by step guide for sowing in dry summer soils) you can keep yourself well supplied with these rosettes.

Slugs and snails also find pak choi and its friends delicious, so if the weather turns wet, regularly patrol the drills at dusk. Butterfly netting will keep cabbage whites and pigeons at bay, allowing you to be the sole beneficiary of these tender rosettes.

Don't be alarmed by cherries

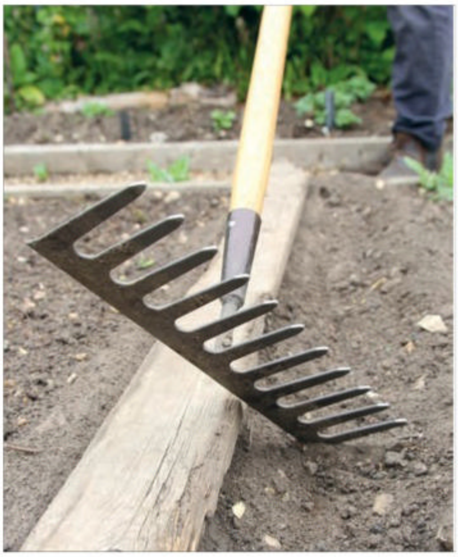
✿ It's tempting to behave otherwise, but I'm here to tell you to hold your nerve whilst your cherries go through a test this month. You may have already noticed 'problems' appearing but they can be easily solved, or even ignored. My fruit set in mid May was really good on this 'Celeste' tree, but I can already see that some of the fruitlets are shrivelling, turning yellow and falling off. This can be due to drought stress or poor pollination, but by keeping my tree well mulched with compost to lock in soil moisture, and by ensuring it has a pollination partner (in my case, 'Sunburst') close by, I know that both these potential pitfalls are covered (if you're not sure about pollination, check with a good fruit nursery). Cherries will naturally shed a few fruits in June, so as long as dry roots and incomplete pollination aren't to blame, just sit tight and let it happen.

Lucy explains how to help cherry harvests

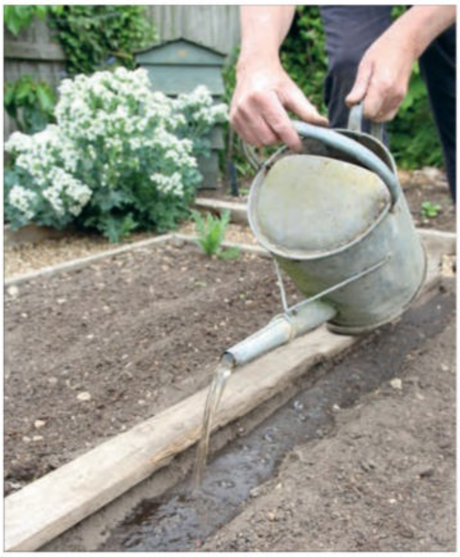
All images unless otherwise credited © Lucy Chamberlain

Step by step Sowing into dry soil

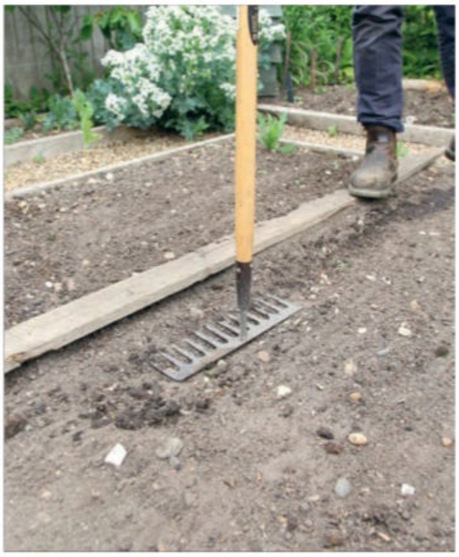
It's essential to keep up with sowings if you want a succession of harvests through summer and into autumn, especially for those crops that bulk up quickly, like salad leaves, radishes and beetroot. But sowing into dry soil can result in poor germination and disappointing results. Luckily, I have a few tips to share to guarantee great results, so, read on!



1 First things first, read the seed packet. Whatever sowing depth is recommended for the seeds, double it. This simple act will still allow resulting seedlings to emerge above the soil, but by sowing them slightly deeper than recommended they'll be safely held away from the 'danger zone' – i.e. the top layer of soil that's most prone to drying out.



2 Now make your drill to this increased depth (using the corner of a rake or hoe against a wooden board makes this task simple). Once the drill is made, soak the base of it thoroughly. Puddle water along its entire length, giving it time to soak away completely. Repeat this a further two or three times to really saturate the lower depths of soil.



3 Finally, sow in the usual way, then cover over the drill (you can use the surrounding dry soil for this) and firm it down gently – I do this by tamping it down with the back of my rake. Now cover over this finished drill with shading material like fleece or an old blanket, to stop moisture evaporating. Check it daily and remove it once seedlings appear.

Top tip

Help courgettes and their relatives

✿ It's no secret that courgettes and other squashes (e.g. pumpkins, patty pans, butternuts, etc.) have an aggressive appetite and thirst – this is, after all, how they can develop an abundance of huge fruits. Those of us on lighter, free-draining soils can adopt a few tricks to keep their hunger satisfied. Work plenty of well-rotted organic matter (e.g. homemade compost) into the planting holes. This material will lock onto any moisture that's added to the soil. You can also encourage water to soak in where it's needed. Create a shallow bowl in the soil around each plant (like a moat) or sink an upturned bottle with its base cut off, alongside each plant. Mark the bottle or moat with a tall cane so that when you water you can clearly tell exactly where to add it. Neat work!

Right: Lucy explains how to help keep squash satisfied in summer

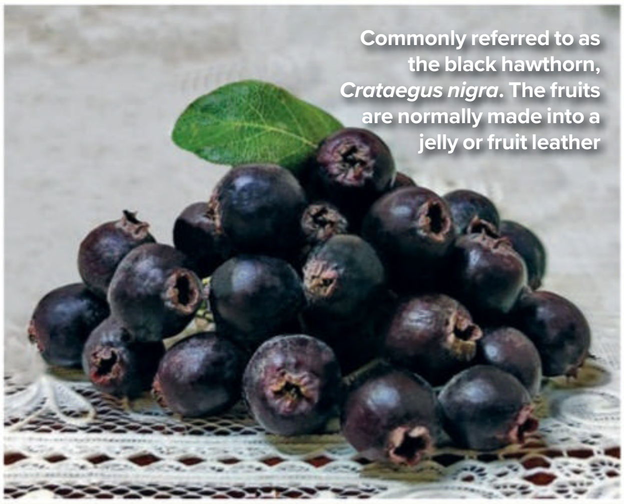
Your GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with **Lucy Chamberlain**, AG's fruit and veg expert

Why not try...?

Black hawthorn

✿ If you cast your mind back to May, you'll recall that hawthorns or 'May flowers' were in full bloom. Hedgerow hawthorns are usually examples of *Crataegus monogyna*, but today I'm writing about another species, *C. nigra*. Commonly called the black hawthorn, this species has larger, silver birch-like leaves and springtime clusters of frothy white flowers. The fruits develop in summer and, as the name implies, they're jet black. They can be eaten raw but because of the seeds within, they are more commonly cooked, strained and made into a flavoursome jelly (fruit leathers are also worth a try). As well as being edible, trees are also highly ornamental (mature ones reach 6m (20ft) or so in height). Tolerant of a wide range of soils and weather conditions, this very hardy species is worth consideration in any forest garden scheme.



Commonly referred to as the black hawthorn, *Crataegus nigra*. The fruits are normally made into a jelly or fruit leather

5 quick jobs...

1 Fans of vigorous cane fruits like loganberries, wineberries and blackberries will be faced with a thicket of long canes right now. Some will have flowered and will be starting to bear fruit – others be newly grown this year. Bundle new ones together carefully as they'll bear next summer's harvests.

2 It's not at all too late to sow a batch of beetroot. Sow seeds directly into the soil where they're to be harvested – thin them out as they emerge, keep well watered and these will bulk up beautifully to create roots that can be stored over winter.

3 Lovers of gooseberry fools can harvest fruits right now – culinary types like 'Invicta' will naturally be sharp. If you prefer those varieties that can be eaten fresh rather than cooked (e.g. 'Early Yellow Sulphur' and 'Lancashire Lad') leave them on the bush to ripen fully (indicated by softening flesh) to enjoy the best sugar levels.

4 If you find that potted edibles are frequently drying out during spells of warm, dry or windy weather, move the containers to a shadier spot. The foliage can still remain in the sun, but by shading the roots you'll keep them cool, and allow any moisture given to be taken up by the plants.

5 This is a tough task – but if you can bring yourself to do so, remove the first sweet (bell) pepper that appears per plant, and the first beefsteak tomato. These edibles are notorious for producing oversized initial fruits, which then steal excess goodness from any more that try to form. So, bite the bullet to gain better harvests long term.

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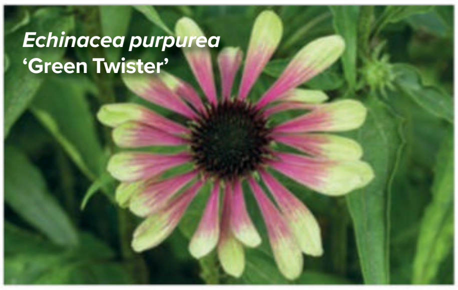
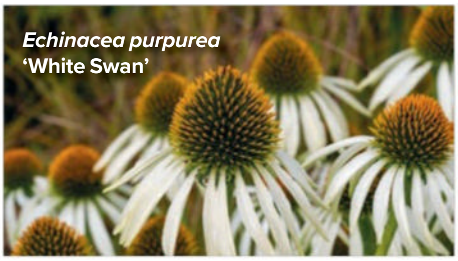
Small space | Big ideas

With **Nick Hamilton** of Barnsdale Gardens

Verbena bonariensis in the Mediterranean garden at Barnsdale



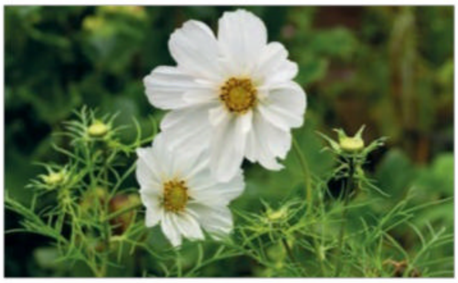
Echinacea purpurea 'Green Twister'



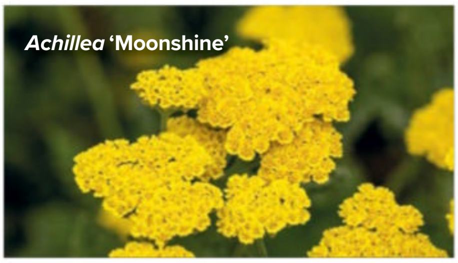
Echinacea purpurea 'White Swan'

How to create a pollinator paradise

Nick Hamilton reveals his favourite nectar-rich blooms



Above: *Cosmos bipinnatus* 'Sea Shells' delights people and pollinators alike



Achillea 'Moonshine'

Having been part of the original organic trials at Barnsdale nearly 40 years ago and continuing to garden organically, I am only too aware how important nectar-rich plants are for pollinating insects. With numbers of these insects falling worryingly, gardeners can help to stem that decline.

Annuals to add zing

There are many annuals that will add colourful sparkle to a border or container and one of my favourite half-hardies is the zinnia. I grow them in my cut flower area and they come in a range of bright colours. Cosmos are also great for pollinators and pest predators, and I love their feathery leaves.

A complete contrast are the sunflowers, which seem to illuminate a space. If it's a taste of California you want then try the stunning single, orange flowers of hardy *Eschscholzia californica* (California poppy), which also comes in a mixed range of reds, pinks and white and will self-seed readily.

Annuals suitable for baskets and containers that will also have the pollinators buzzing around them include petunias, marigolds and nasturtiums. If you want hot colours, these will certainly do the job throughout summer and autumn.

Look at hot hardy perennials

Many tender perennials will bring both a blast of hot colour as well as queues of beneficial insects. I love verbenas for this very reason, but pelargoniums and salvias are great too and one of my favourites is *Salvia guaranitica* 'Black and Blue', which gets to around 2.4 x 2m (8 x 6ft). All of these plants mentioned will also fare well in a sunny border.

Helianthus 'Lemon Queen' illuminates a garden

For hot colours and lots of nectar then echinaceas are perfect, although some are not as hardy as others. The cones are also great for extended interest and seeds for the birds. Achillea, hardy *Salvia nemorosa* and *S* x *sylvestris* varieties will act like a honeypot and both look great when mixed with grasses.

My top choice is the penstemon, which flowers over a very long period and comes in a range of colours. One of the hottest is 'Pensham Laura', although I obviously have to favour *Penstemon* 'Geoff Hamilton'!

The previous perennials mentioned are all medium height, but if you want something taller consider the elegant blue-mauve spikes of *Veronicastrum virgatum* 'Fascination' and for late nectar, *Helianthus* 'Lemon Queen' is a lemon yellow sunflower that brightens any dull late summer or autumn border.

■ Barnsdale Gardens in Rutland, East Midlands, has been enthralling garden fans since 1983 when Geoff Hamilton, the much-loved presenter of BBC *Gardeners' World*, bought a Victorian farmhouse with over five acres of land. Barnsdale was Geoff's 'great experiment' in peat-free and chemical-free growing, and his legacy continues today with his son Nick ensuring that the 38 gardens are kept to the stunning standard for which they are renowned. **Visit www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk**

All images © Steve Hamilton unless stated

15 Money-saving rewards

Editor and multi award-winning resilient-gardening expert **Kim Stoddart** offers more thrifty ideas to help you boost cost-free results naturally this summer

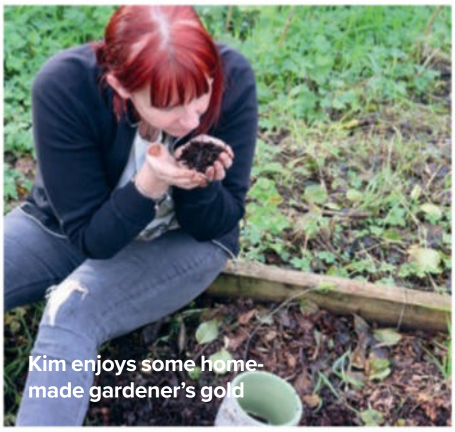
Saving money feels good on every level and is by no means a lesser form of gardening. Quite the opposite in fact. Making, mending and creating useful materials out of what you have readily available provides added feel-good empowerment via the knowledge that you aren't reliant on buying absolutely everything in. It makes you think, innovate and get hands-on, building your confidence, connecting you with your surroundings and channelling the gardeners of yore.

It also turns the idea of anything being 'single use' on its silly head and lets you protect the planet by reducing plastic, turning waste items into something wondrous and perhaps, best of all, it can help improve your gardening efforts and your ability to solve problems as your garden grows. All in the name of money-saving to boot. How great is that?

Here are just a few more ideas to help you on your merry resilient-gardening way:

4 ways to boost home-made composting

Saving money doesn't come better than turning kitchen and garden waste into the most wondrous soil improver for your garden. Here are some additional cost-free ways to further your supply.


Kim enjoys some home-made gardener's gold

All images unless stated © Kim Stoddart

Kim adding comfrey to the heap

- Use non-invasive weeds as an added ingredient
Anton Rosenfeld talks about weeds and their use on page 46, and they also make a fantastic compost ingredient as well if soaked first for a few weeks so the roots and seed heads break down. Yes it will smell, but you can use a weighted bin lid on the container to help seal in the whiff. Then just pour your ingredients onto the compost and let the clever composting process do the rest.

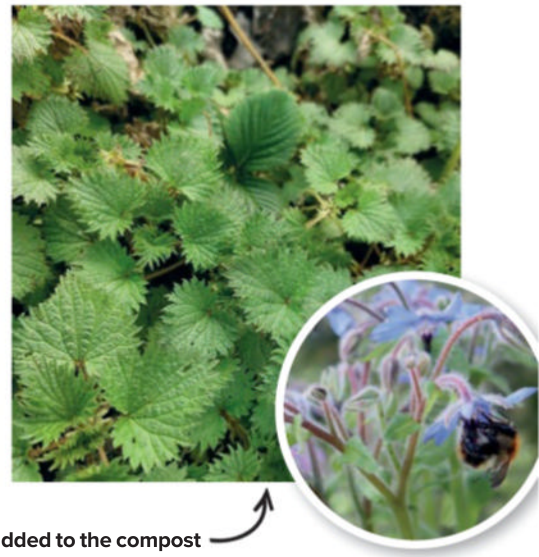
- Make use of old clothing
If you have clothing made from natural materials which is too holey to send to a charity shop, then consider cutting it up and composting it instead. Organic cottons, wool, bamboo and such-like that's been made without bleach can be cut up into small pieces and added to the pile.

- Add cereal or packaging boxes and some tea bags
Nowadays most supermarket cardboard boxes are printed with vegetable dyes and can be torn up and added to the compost as a brown ingredient. Just remove any staples or plastic first. Also, as long as a tea bag is plastic-free it can be added safely, along with coffee grinds.

- Comfrey, nettles and borage
All of these make very useful compost-boosting additions. Comfrey itself is what's called a dynamic accumulator, which means it is able to pull up minerals from deep in the soil which will add to the potency of your heap. Nettle leaves (without roots or seed heads, which should instead be soaked in water) are also good additions, along with borage for a super-charged supply.

One of the many compost bins at the impressive compost making bays at Clynfyw Care Farm in Pembrokeshire

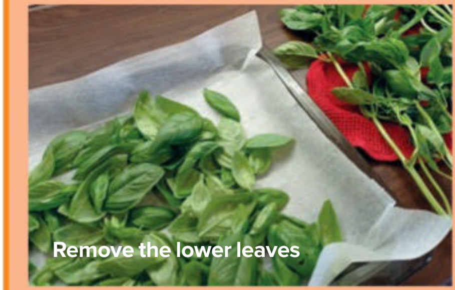
- Not forgetting grass clippings and prunings
This last one may be obvious, but you'll be surprised how many gardeners don't make use of these in their compost making. Grass clippings can be added as a thin green layer and prunings help to aerate the compost, boosting nitrogen and aiding the decomposition process no end.


Nettle leaves and borage (inset) can be added to the compost (just no seed heads or roots without first soaking)

6 easy ways to maximise edible harvests

At this time of year here are some of my favourites to boost home-grown rewards

- More bountiful basil
Pinch some stems from an existing plant (roughly four inches long), remove the lower leaves and place in a glass of water on a sunny windowsill. Within a few weeks the stems will start to root and when they look robust enough can be planted out in lovely peat-free compost to further your supply.


Remove the lower leaves

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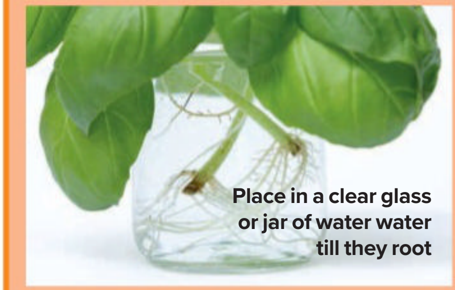
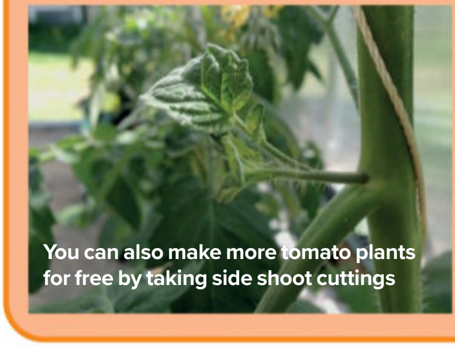

Place in a clear glass or jar of water water till they root

© Shutterstock

- Try rooting cordon (tall) tomato plant stems
Trail a tomato stem along the ground and use a stone to hold it in place before it grows up and watch as it sets down roots over time. Doing this will create a more resilient plant with, in my experience, better harvests as your plant is obtaining food and water from more than one place. You can do this per stem, and even try it in a few places depending on what works with your growing space. It also means your plants need less watering. Bonus!


You can also make more tomato plants for free by taking side shoot cuttings

© Shutterstock

- Make use of edible veg flowers
In the vegetable garden, when your brassicas try to set seed, the pretty yellow flowers are edible and look so pretty used to decorate food. The same applies to rocket, radish (pictured) and lettuce to name but a few. Allowing some to flower helps biodiversity and makes home-grown dishes shine.

- Try and grow on weaker-looking seedlings
This goes against traditional advice, but do bear in mind that when thinning out seedlings, that seed that didn't germinate as well as the others might just have been deeper in the soil, and could catch up. Equally, it's worth giving plants a chance to grow on as with good quality soil, they often still provide a decent harvest. This saves wasting plants.

- Do plant swaps with friends, family, neighbours, strangers...
Have too much of one thing and would like to expand the varieties you are growing? Why not reach out and partake in some good old-fashioned barter and exchange. Don't be shy. Your local gardening group, online forum, maybe a chat in the old garden centre - and who knows what you could end up with in return.

- Grow on some brassica and Swiss chard
It's really easy to do and so worthwhile. Cutting them back when they start to flower helps to conserve their energy and enables them to grow on and on. This works especially well under cover. I have grown purple-sprouting broccoli for up to nine years in a polytunnel, and Swiss chard also for many years. Loose leaf kale can also grow on and on for super-productive fuss-free plants.

Purple-sprouting broccoli can keep producing year after year if cut back

Top 5 seed to save from on the veg patch

You can save the seeds from many homegrown plants, choosing good resilient crops with which to work, but here are the most straightforward ones to try.

Lettuce
Just allow a healthy-looking lettuce to grow tall, flower and set seed. If the summer is wet (let's hope not) then you are best off doing this with a plant you can bring inside as you don't want the seed to rot. Otherwise, it's very easy to do and one plant will provide an absolute abundance of seed for the following years.

Rocket
This cheeky resilient veg patch staple will happily self-seed around your garden and provide useful ground cover around other crops so I say let it spread. You can save the seed and dry it for storage, but it will readily do the job nicely by itself given the chance.

Radish
These seeds are also edible, as are the pretty flowers, and the pods can be left to harden off on the plant, or brought inside to dry and be safely stored away in a paper envelope or old seed packet.

Peas and French beans
These are the best two legumes with which to work for seed saving. Just choose the healthiest, most productive plants and allow one pod to bulk out for the best quality seed supply.

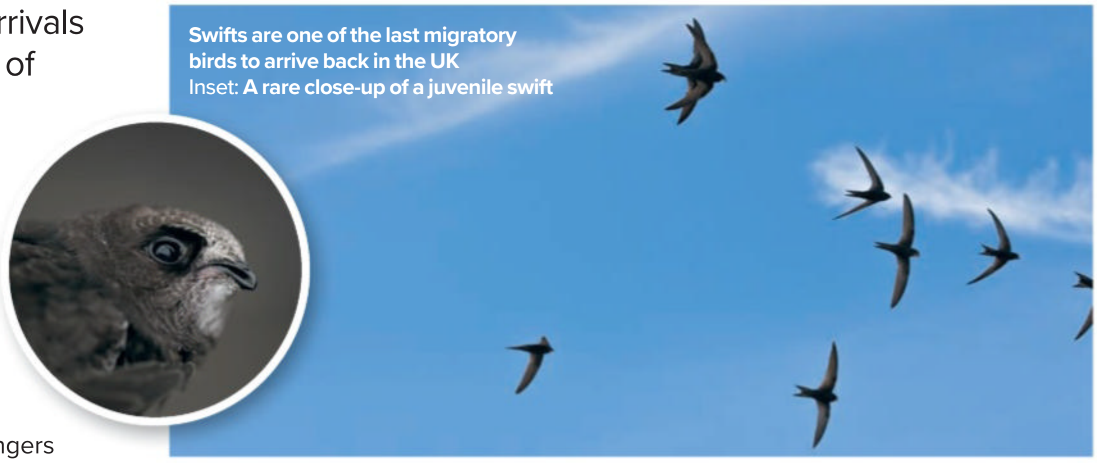
© Shutterstock

Tomatoes and chilli
As the season progresses you'll know which plants are performing best and worth saving seeds from. You also have to savour the joy of fresh tomato eating first, let's get our priorities straight! Once you are ready to save seed just remove the almost over-ripe tomatoes, place the seed on a piece of paper or card and allow them to dry in a warm spot inside before storing safely away.

Garden wildlife watch

Bird of the month – the sensational swift

These speedy late arrivals herald the 'real' start of summer



Swifts are one of the last migratory birds to arrive back in the UK
Inset: **A rare close-up of a juvenile swift**

© Ben Andrew RSPB Images

Swifts are not strictly speaking what would be described as a garden bird – but their dependency on nesting in buildings makes them a familiar sight over our towns and cities, and June is a great month to watch out for them!

Often considered the 'bringers of summer' because they are one of the last migratory birds to arrive in the UK, they are incredible for so many reasons - from their aerial acrobatics, swooping, swirling and 'screaming' high above our heads, to their monumental journeys of thousands of miles. But perhaps, the fact they do this whilst barely ever touching down is the most amazing thing of all!

When a swift lands at a nest site in the UK in spring, this is likely to be the first time they've stopped flying since they left the site last year, flew to Africa and spent the winter on that continent. They eat, sleep and even mate on the wing – a true bird of the skies! As they don't typically begin to breed until they are around four, this can mean four straight years of flying – how incredible is that?

Listen out for the 'screaming party' (this is actually what it's called) which announces the fact you have numerous swifts flying overhead, and look up – the long narrow wings, spread in a crescent shape, give the birds an unmistakeable silhouette. They are only here for a few short months, to raise a brood and then they head off on their travels again and return to Africa.

Unique and iconic as they are, swifts are another bird species that has seen a stark decline in the last 30 years, with more than 60% of the population lost in that time. This is largely because swifts rely on nesting in the nooks and crannies of old buildings, especially under the eaves – spaces which are increasingly disappearing as people renovate, or even remove, these old properties, and new-builds don't provide the birds with the same nexting facilities.

Swifts are loyal to sites, coming back to the same spot year after year, so when they are no longer there, it's likely that the swifts won't find a new site in time to breed that year. Declining insect numbers – swifts eat air-borne insects - is also a huge challenge for the species. But there are things we can do to help them – and our gardens are an excellent place to start.

How to help swifts

- ■ Putting up a swift nestbox on your house or on an outbuilding helps to replace some of those lost nesting sites.
- ■ Adding insect-friendly plants to your garden, especially native species.
- ■ Buy or build your own bug hotel – it can be as simple as drilling some holes in an old piece of wood or making a simple log pile.
- ■ Choosing not to use pesticides in your garden, which are harmful to so much wildlife.

Frequently asked questions

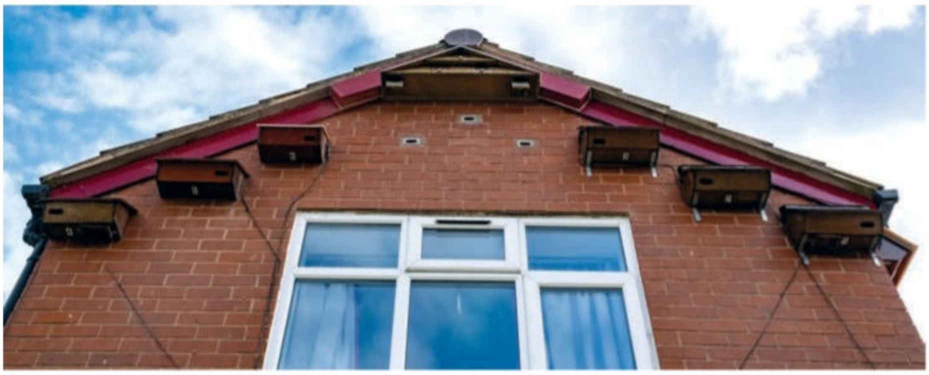
Q I get confused between swifts and swallows – any tips?

A Swifts tend to fly quite high and have a crescent shape, with quite narrow wings whilst swallows – also nimble – often swoop much lower and have a distinctive forked tail, with two long 'streamers'.

Q I have a blackbird nest in my garden, which is now empty. Will it be used again?

A Blackbirds often have two, even three broods in a season and whilst they won't use the same nest, they may nest again nearby and sometimes use material from the old nest to build a new one.

For more information about helping swifts, go to *www. rspb.org.uk*



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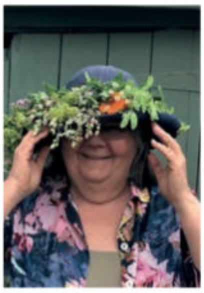
As swifts are colony birds, you can put up a number of swift boxes together if you have the room

Barbara explains how to grow your own Szechuan pepper, cardamon, curry leaf and fenugreek

4 home-grown spices



Barbara Segall shares the highs and lows of growing plants for culinary seasonings

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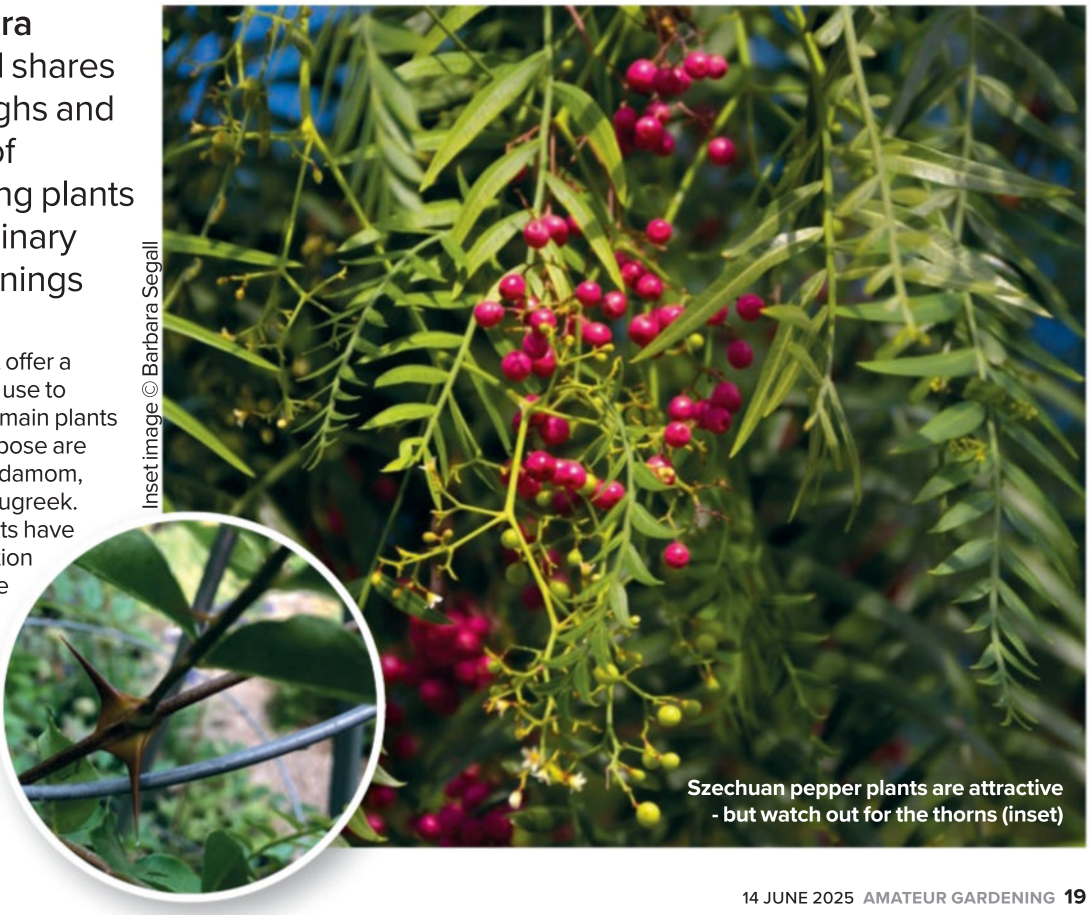
I grow many plants that offer a spicy aroma and that I use to flavour food. The four main plants that I grow for this purpose are Szechuan pepper, cardamom, curry leaf tree and fenugreek. Cardamom and curry leaf plants have to be given overwinter protection or grown as houseplants, while fenugreek is a hardy annual and Szechuan pepper thrives outdoors in my garden.

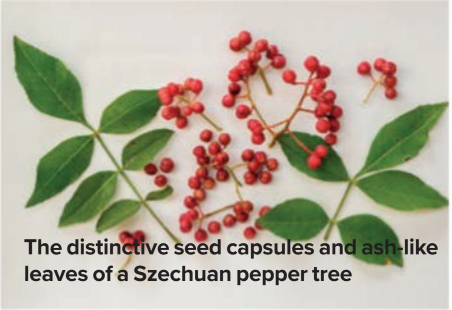
Szechuan pepper

Most people would choose a beautifully coloured and fragrant rose to grow over

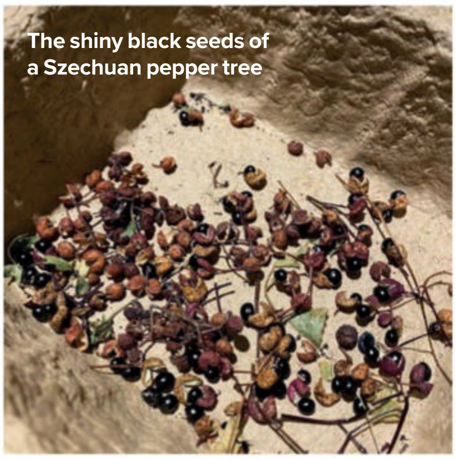
Inset image © Barbara Segall


Szechuan pepper plants are attractive - but watch out for the thorns (inset)

Drying Szechuan peppers and their capsules



The distinctive seed capsules and ash-like leaves of a Szechuan pepper tree



The shiny black seeds of a Szechuan pepper tree

© Barbara Segall

Dried cardamom pods ready for use

a metal archway. Not me! Instead that was the position I chose for a Szechuan pepper tree (*Zanthoxylum simulans*) that I bought several years ago and which, armed like a heat-seeking missile with massive thorns, has the smallest, least fragrant flowers possible. Instead, it has the hottest spicy seed capsules that I grind to make a hot-hot pepper. Its common name is prickly ash due to its green ash-like foliage, which turns a butter-yellow in autumn, and, of course, the thorns.

This tree is self-fertile and produces its tiny flowers and seed capsules regularly. The flowers are so insignificant that I have to remind myself to look for them in late summer and then, subsequently, for the rosy seed capsules that appear in autumn. It is a delicate task harvesting the seeds due to the unforgiving thorns.

I collect the seed capsules and keep them in small cardboard boxes in a dry, warm spot where they eventually open out. As they start to split open you can see and remove the shiny black seeds - it's quite therapeutic! Then I store the capsules until I am ready to use them.

Szechuan (also spelled Sichuan) pepper is one of the ingredients in a Chinese five spice mix. The aromatic leaves, fresh or dried, are also used in the kitchen - I use them for hot spicy dishes and crush the seed capsules to provide a citrusy pepper hit. They are particularly good with pork and beans.

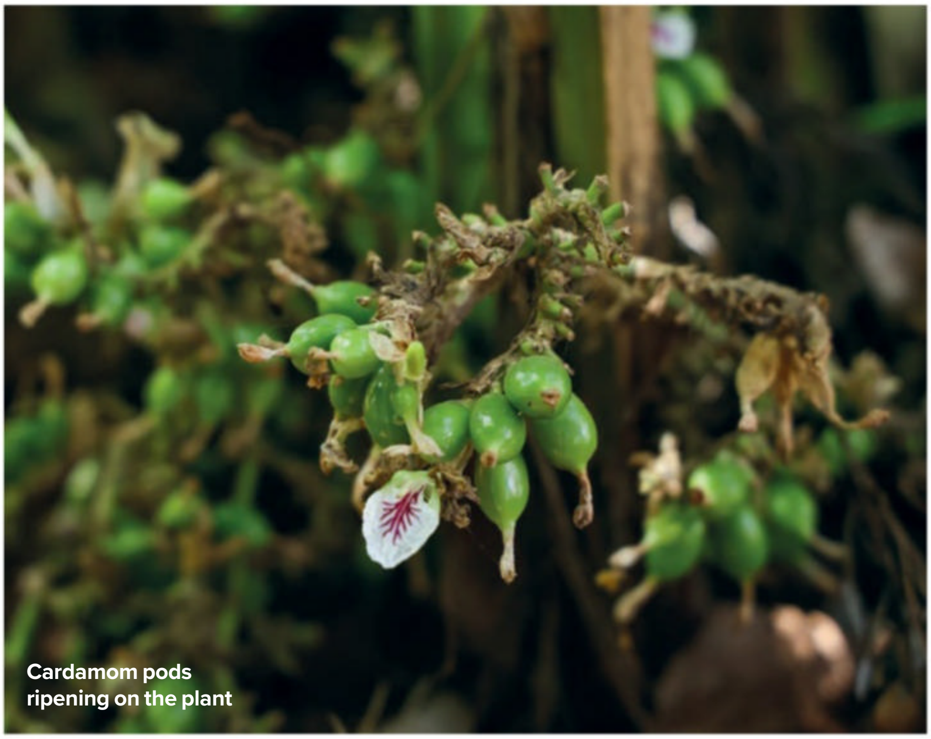
My tree, growing up and over a metal arch, is about 2m (6.5ft) tall and I have tied it back into the metal framework so that it doesn't attack unwary visitors. It is in full sun, but they will do well in light shade in sheltered sites. I haven't pruned it but you can cut plants back to keep them to the size and shape you want.

Where to buy
Jurassic Plants *www.jurassicplants.co.uk*

Cardamom

I have grown cardamom (*Elettaria cardamomum*) for several years. I put it outdoors in partial shade in a sheltered position in mid-summer. Although it has flowered once, in my heated greenhouse, it has not yet produced spicy cardamom pods. The leaves, though, are spicy enough for me and I use them for a zingy flavour in cooked dishes and in teas.

Cardamom, a tropical perennial with rhizomatous roots, is a member of the



Cardamom pods ripening on the plant

© Barbara Segall

Pots of newly divided cardamom

© Barbara Segall

One of Barbara's curry leaf plants

ginger family and is not hardy in the UK. It needs humid conditions and do well in bathrooms. I overwinter the cardamom in the heated greenhouse or in the house on sunny windowsills. I keep it on the dry side through winter but in spring, when the leaves begin to unfurl, I start to water and feed on a regular basis.

Although cardamom plants don't like root disturbance, I have had to divide and repot mine as it was getting too crowded in its original pot and now have four or five pots. They are back in the greenhouse to settle down before going out for the summer.

Where to buy
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www.plants4presents.co.uk

Curry leaf plant

The curry leaf plant (*Bergera koenigii* or *Murraya koenigii*) is an evergreen tree in tropical or sub-tropical climates, but here it needs protection for much of the year so I grow it as a houseplant. In winter I water it sparingly when the compost feels dry. In spring and summer I give it a weekly liquid seaweed feed and water it regularly.

Last year I had two plants and in the height of summer I put them outdoors in a warm, sunny site but if there was any hint of the night temperatures dropping, I brought them indoors where they grew well on a sunny windowsill away from radiators and draughts.

The oval, aromatic curry leaves, which are pungent and used so much in Indian cuisine, are arranged in pairs on leaf stems. They are best used fresh but you can dry them and I have also frozen them to use in stews. Although it is evergreen my plants lost their leaves in winter, so I was pleased to see leaves coming through in spring.

I repotted my curry leaf plants when they put on some height and harvested a few leaf stalks in their second year. One of the plants was badly affected by scale insect infestation and, despite removing scale insects regularly using a thumbnail and cotton wool soaked in spirit alcohol, and also wiping the leaves with an olive oil-based soap, I just never managed to get it back to a healthy state of growth.

I first saw a curry leaf tree growing in a garden in South Africa. It was about 2m (6.5ft) high and it was great to be able to pick the leaves for use. Although I have not been completely successful growing them as houseplants, I will persevere and order them again as small pot plants.

Where to buy
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The leaves of curry leaf plant are best used fresh but can also be dried or frozen

Fenugreek has spicy, flavoursome foliage that tastes best when young or cooked

Barbara sprouts fenugreek seeds on kitchen paper to use as microgreens

© Barbara Segall

Fenugreek

Fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*) is a hardy annual and is easy to grow. The leaves, divided into three clover-like leaflets, have a spicy flavour when eaten young or as sprouted seeds.

I usually sow it direct in rows in my raised beds from April onwards, planted quite closely so that the plants, which tend to sprawl, will support each other. I usually sow seed in succession, so that I have plenty of its aromatic, sweet-tasting foliage available. It also suits growing in containers.

The leaves are good cooked or as a salad leaf and the seeds (it flowers after about six weeks) are spicy and used crushed to make curry powder. Raw it has a slightly bitter taste but when cooked this becomes more sweet and nutty. The leaves add a spicy flavour to soups and casseroles while the seed is good toasted.

I am sowing some onto kitchen towel to use as sprouted seeds, a bit like mung beans. I am also sowing into lidded containers, as you would sow cress to use as microgreens. They will be ready to eat as microgreens within three weeks as I grow them in full sun on a windowsill. Sprouted seed germinates very quickly and can be used in sandwiches and salads. Sow successionally, a little and often.

Fenugreek is easy to grow and the seeds can be sown in succession for a long period of cropping

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Consider what you want from your seating areas - it could be shade, privacy or somewhere scented, with perfumed roses and other plants

Secrets to a sensational seating area

Mike Palmer explains how to choose the perfect plants for radiance, rest and relaxation

All images unless otherwise credited: Mike Palmer

> *"To sit in the shade on a fine day and look upon verdure is the most perfect refreshment"*
> *Jane Austen*

Much has been written about seating in the garden, both its importance and the varying assortment available. Today, I'm going to take this important topic quite literally by the seat of its pants, but with an emphasis on how to plant around a seating area to optimise R&R... &R! – that's Rest & Relaxation and Rejuvenation! Or, conversely, to give the weary gardener (isn't that all of us?) a much-needed lift; a boost to inject a renewed spring in our step.

Choosing the right plants for a place, in this case our seating area, will take it from being purely functional to a considered, well thought through horticultural haven. The words of Jane Austen (shown far left) allude to looking upon verdure for perfect refreshment, but alongside the green, lush growth to which she refers, I'm going to share the benefits of including colour, scent and texture, the combination of which will provide the perfect perch for tired gardeners. So please, in the spirit of this article, grab a cuppa and take a well-appointed seat.

Above: Mike uses his garden's seating areas for rest, relaxation and rejuvenation - and a well-deserved cuppa

How plants affect our mood

Colour plays an integral part in influencing our mood and how we

Green has a calming effect on the human eye

© Shutterstock

perceive the world around us, including in our gardens. Green, the predominant colour of most plants, has the most calming effect upon the human eye, which is why so many of us seek the sanctuary of gardens, communal parks and forests when stress and anxiety come a-knocking. Other colours too have soothing effects upon us, including soft pinks, blues, whites and silvers. Conversely, vibrant reds, yellows and oranges stimulate us, awakening our senses and lifting our mood.

In conjunction with colour, scented plants also play an important role, bringing us comfort, uplift, restfulness and the restoration of emotional balance, all of which stimulate energy and enhance mindfulness.

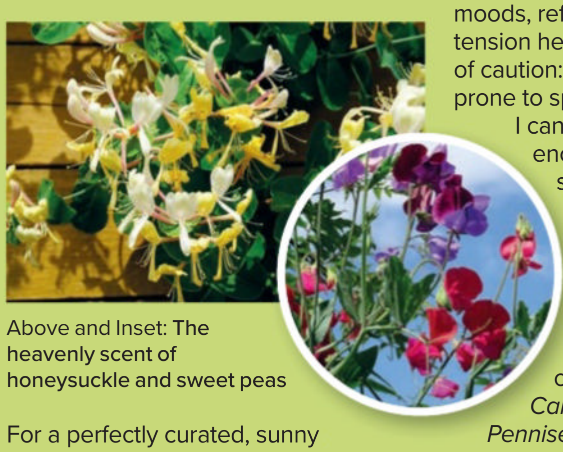
How to create a seating checklist

We add texture, which allows gardeners and garden visitors to de-stress further, improve their sense of wellbeing and trigger the release of feel-good chemicals like dopamine, our brain's 'feel-good' signal. Textured foliage, stems or bark when stroked or caressed can lower high blood pressure and heart rate.

Some plants combine all the ▶

Mike's plant picks

Above: *Rosa* Princess Anne ('Auskitchen') underplanted with the deepest purple flowers of *Lavandula* 'Hidcote'



Above and Inset: The heavenly scent of honeysuckle and sweet peas

For a perfectly curated, sunny seating area consider surrounding it with the delightfully scented *Rosa* Princess Anne ('Auskitchen') underplanted with the deepest purple flowers of *Lavandula* 'Hidcote'. A climbing jasmine, *Trachelospermum jasminoides* or honeysuckle, such as *Lonicera* 'Halliana' might adorn an overhead pergola or nearby fence, while sweetly scented sweet peas (*Lathyrus odorata*) in a nearby border might perfume a patio with their uplifting scent.

Pots of scented-leaved pelargoniums positioned by seats invite occupants to reach out and caress the foliage, emitting uplifting and mood-enhancing hints of rose, zingy lemon, mint and nutmeg. *Pelargonium* 'Attar of Roses' or 'Citronella' are my favourites.

Many herbs are also adept at enhancing our mood and promoting wellbeing with their medicinal properties and scent-laden foliage, so are ideal candidates for a seating area. Rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*) is known for easing mental fatigue and improving concentration, and refreshing mint (*Mentha spp.*) lifts moods, refreshes the mind and relieves tension headaches. However, a word of caution: grow mint in pots, as it's prone to spreading excitedly!

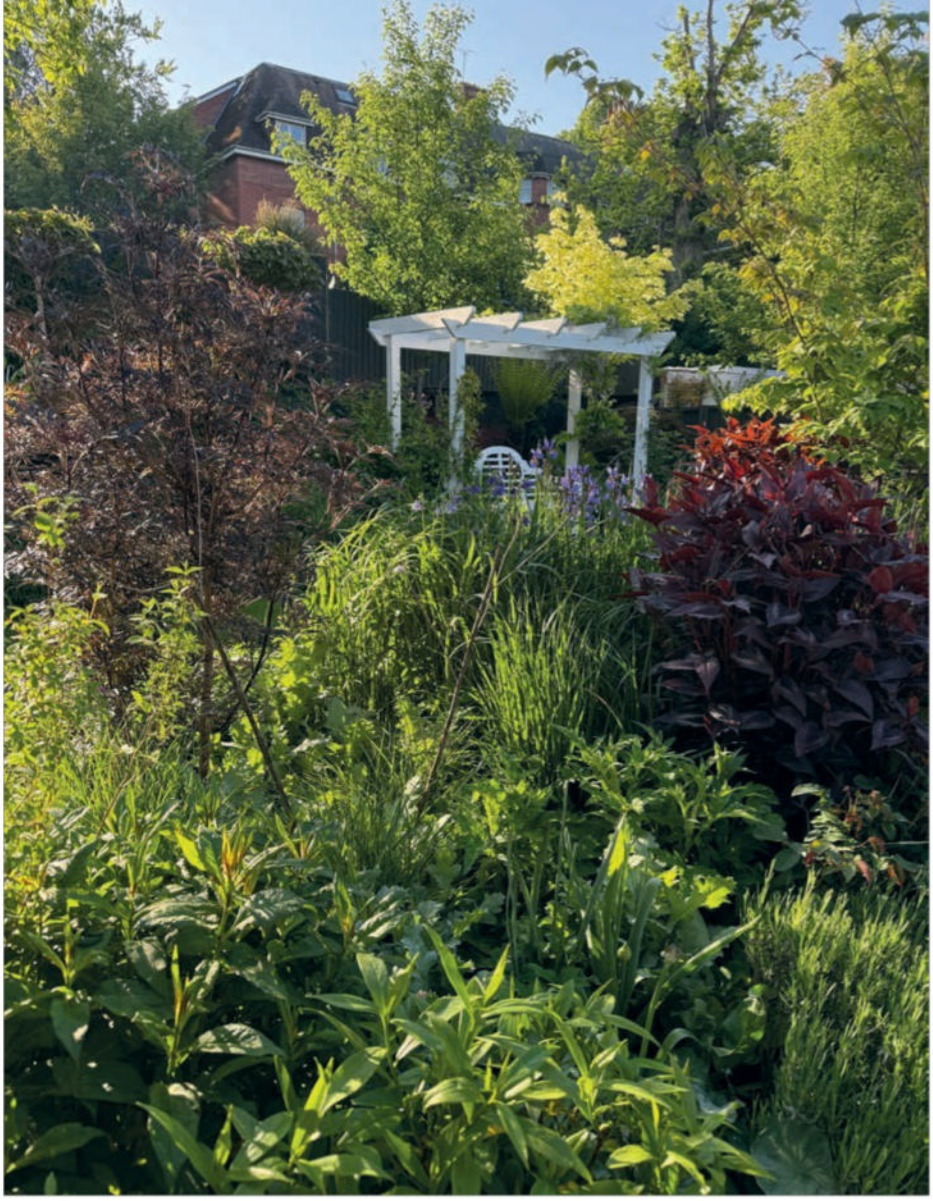
I can't resist running my dirt-encrusted digits through a swathe of *Stipa tenuissima* (Mexican feathergrass) or caressing the soft-velvety foliage of *Stachys byzantina* (lamb's ear). In my garden I place large containers with ornamental grasses including *Calamagrostis* 'Overdam' or *Pennisetum* 'Hameln' either side of garden seats – it's only moments before someone is to be found combing the soft, upright blades of the grasses between their fingers, as the worries of the world begin to fade away.

A seat in a shady glade might more likely reflect the verdant tones referenced earlier by Miss Austen, with her tapestry of greens helping to soothe a furrowed brow. So, in shade or partial shade textured plants, including the ruffled foliage of heucheras, some grasses and ferns, tick that box perfectly.

I dare you not to lean forward from your repose to reach out and tickle the warming bronze and amber curls of *Heuchera* 'Caramel' or the fine, pale yellow and green-striped foliage of *Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola'. Ferns like *Dryopteris affinis* 'Cristata' are also crying out for a human touch.

Hakone grass encourages you to stroke it and switch off from the world at large in the process

Above and Inset: Let lavender and rosemary sooth the senses by seating



A seating area should create a verdant oasis of escape from the stresses of daily life

components, like the perfumed, purple, pink and white blooms and silvery, textured foliage of lavenders, which have been scientifically proven to reduce anxiety and stress, and aid sleep. Scented roses and jasmine, as well as other plants, can also be beneficial, reducing anxiety and lifting our mood while reducing levels of cortisol, the stress hormone that is necessary day-to-day, but can bring about troubled sleep, anxiety, fatigue and a weakened immune system if levels remain too high for too long. So, let's plant our seat sanctuaries to fully indulge and surround ourselves with plants beneficial to us and our wellbeing.

How to plant around seating

Being somewhat obsessed by plants, and that's all of us, ensure your seating areas (notice the purposeful pluralisation) are surrounded by plants.

Position seats near or even within borders to optimise the benefits of green therapy. Taller scented shrubs including intoxicating lilacs (*Syringa vulgaris*) or mock orange (*Philadelphus coronarius*) will transport you to far-off climes – a holiday in your own garden, without the stresses of travel and packing!

Cocooned now within a calming or cheering chorus of colour, scent and texture, take one final step to indulge yourself to the max. Sumptuous cushions, throws and blankets add a most welcome touch of glamour, but most importantly, comfort. Spoil yourself – you're worth it!

And finally, please do as I say, not as I do: full disclosure, I can't sit down for more than two minutes without seeing something that needs to be done or a picture that needs to be posted! Please relax and enjoy the beauty of your bench!

Of course your seating will prove popular with all the household

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Kim explains how to plant mixed borders with differently sized dahlias. Pictured here with echinacea and gaura

How to use dahlias in borders

Kim O'Brien outlines some of the best planting partnerships for bold and beautiful borders

I once heard someone say they loved dahlias, but didn't grow them at home because they weren't sure what to plant alongside them. They believed dahlias were too big, too bold and too much for the average border.

But not all dahlias are giants that take over the garden. While some can effortlessly reach heights of 1.2-1.8m (4-6ft) or more, most will happily stop growing at 90cm or 1.2m (3-4ft) if you moderate feeding. The more compact patio varieties are smaller still if that's what suits your growing space.

A common concern is that large 'blousy' blooms might overpower the border. Giant decorative varieties like 'Café au Lait' and 'Breakout' can easily span 20-25cm (8-10in) in diameter, but planted

All images unless otherwise credited: Kim O'Brien

Kim loved this planting combination with *Dahlia* 'Karma Choc' at RHS Hyde Hall

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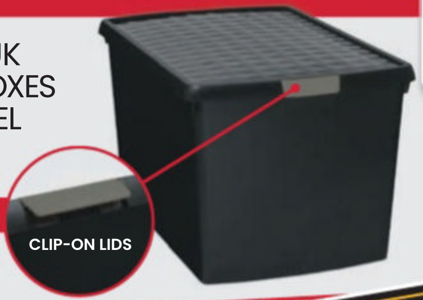

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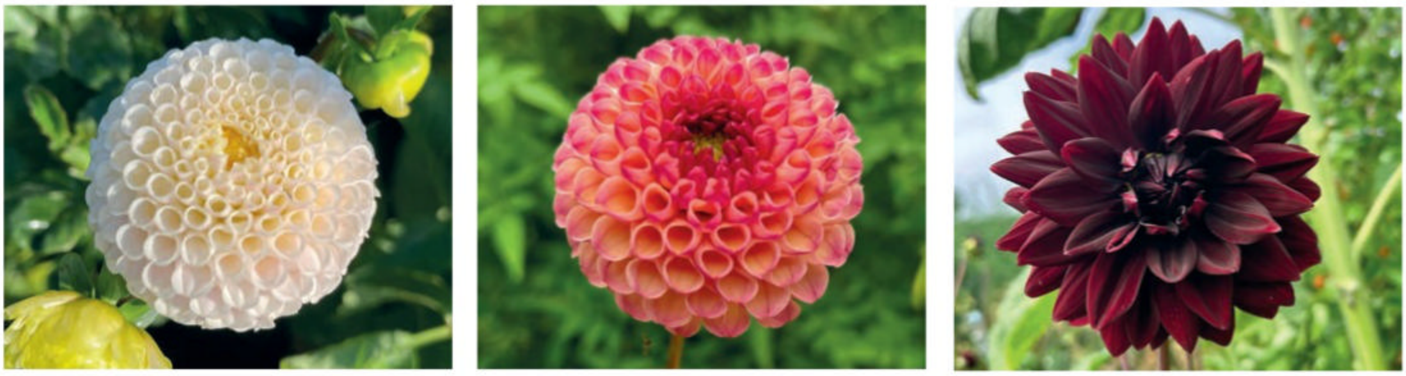
Smaller varieties can blend into a border such as (left to right) 'Small World', 'Nuland's Josephine' and 'Arabian Night'



against a foil of bold, large-leaved foliage, like *Fatsia japonica,* the results can be breathtaking.

A striking example with large dahlias

Recalling a dramatic planting scheme at RHS Hyde Hall, it used decorative *Dahlia* 'Karma Choc' with a large foliage pairing to great effect. With each bloom spanning 15cm (6in) and the plant towering to 1.8m (6ft), it was shown off against a backdrop of purple *Ricinus communis* cascading down from towering green blades into lower grasses before flowing on into ruby heleniums and cerise cosmos, along with achilleas, carex, a patio dahlia ('Bishop of Canterbury') and finally, black *Ophiopogon planiscapus*.

Strategic placing of dahlias by height and diameter coupled with the density of surrounding flowers and foliage size is what constituted the resounding success of this border. A few sparse heads of achillea would have been lost, but its generous drift coupled with the sea of cosmos balanced the dahlias to perfection and the result was a visual triumph.

How to work with smaller dahlias

Of course, not all dahlia blooms are large. If you are tight on space, pompom varieties like 'Small World' and 'Nuland's Josephine', are ideal for working their colour and flair into the border without outcompeting it.

Smaller decoratives like 'Salmon Runner' and 'Arabian Night' can also add impact and statement without eclipsing other more delicate blooms.

Other good dahlia companions

There are several late summer flowers I'd recommend for growing alongside dahlias, including calendula, echinacea, gaura, *Hylotelephium telephium* (sedum) and rudbeckia, as well as asters, Japanese anemones and salvias, and the key to making these work is balanced planting.

Finally, if you're feeling brave, remember that dahlias pair well with other dahlias. This is showcased spectacularly at Anglesey Abbey's 250m dahlia border featuring 1,400 dahlias of 90 varieties. There's no foliage, no fillers, just dahlias, dahlias and more dahlias. Heaven!

There are many good late summer planting companions for dahlias including heleniums

Delightful dahlias upon dahlia at the Anglesey Abbey's 250m dahlia border

Dazzling dahlia

The dark foliage of 'Bishop of Llandaff' contrasts with surrounding greenery.

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With expert broadcaster, author and long-standing *AG* columnist, **Anne Swithinbank**

Fabulous figs, a scented surprise and introducing 'chaos gardening'!

Anne explains how to grow Mediterranean delights and dry scented petals, and she encourages free-spirited gardening

Anne is expecting a good fig harvest this year and explains how to grow this fabulous fruit

Judging by the number of rapidly swelling, medium-sized figs on our 'Brown Turkey', there should be a good harvest this summer. Fig buffs often say this commonly grown cultivar is not the best for flavour, but it is a good doer in our climate and the perfect solution for a south-facing wall. The figs are delicious and spotting their purple ripeness under the foliage is a lovely surprise.

The first rose to flower here is always 'Roseraie de l'Haÿ', opening in May to reveal richly fragrant, double magenta blooms. I feel awkward about mentioning this disease-free cultivar dating from 1901, as it was bred from *Rosa rugosa*, a species regarded as non-native with the potential to spread and cause damage in the wild. Seeds are easily dispersed by birds and once they have a stronghold (often in sand dunes), plants sucker and colonise.

As 'Roseraie de L'Haÿ' sets few hips and the seeds are rarely fertile, we let it flourish in our kitchen garden, but keep a close eye on it and clip off any hips. I rooted this as a hardwood cutting, so the suckers remain true. The petals should make gorgeous potpourri.

Over the years, I've come across a good few gardening trends and recently spotted another, called 'Chaos Gardening'. This seems to consist of preparing a seedbed, mixing and sowing a wide range of seeds together and enjoying exciting results described as easy, carefree, wildlife-friendly and low maintenance.

Having studied the concept and watched a few videos, I've decided my kitchen garden plot is an inside-out chaos garden. The chaos is all on the perimeter and the clearings within are grown or planted in strict parallel lines. 'Right way up' chaos sounds fun, so I think I'll give it a go.

How to grow...figs

The wondrous fig hails from an area stretching from Afghanistan to Syria and is cultivated world-wide in mild climates. In the UK we usually harvest just one crop a year but in Mediterranean regions there are usually two and, in tropical ones, three.

Secretive and invisible, fig flowers are produced inside the fleshy inverted flower head that will become the fruit. In the wild, a tiny fig wasp enters the developing 'fruit' and pollinates some flowers while laying eggs in others. These then turn into galls to house and nourish the wasp larvae. There are no fig wasps in the UK and the cultivars we grow are self-fertile.

Although figs can be successfully grown in containers, they are easier to manage when planted out in a warm, sunny south-facing position, preferably against a wall. They fruit best when the roots are restricted below ground, otherwise an open position and good soil encourages them to romp skywards, with fewer ripe figs held out of reach.

Gather figs when ripe and soft. They will continue to ripen for a couple of days off the plant

The classic method is to excavate a square or rectangular pit 60cm (2ft) deep and line the sides with paving slabs. The open base is filled with rubble or other drainage material and then good quality topsoil. If this seems like hard work, try an underground root bag. Figs are often trained as fans but ours grows against a wooden wall and sprawls outwards. I rarely prune in summer but will reduce the length of vigorous stems in winter.

How much to feed a fig depends on your soil. We rarely feed ours but a spring application of high-potash fertiliser to the roots, or two to three liquid feeds, will perk up needy plants. Medium-sized figs left clinging in autumn should be removed, leaving behind the pea-sized ones to develop in spring. For this and pruning, wear gloves to protect skin from sticky white sap.

All images unless otherwise credited: John Swithinbank

Try these... delicious fig varieties

'Brunswick'
A fig whose handsome, deeply lobed leaves are joined by a heavy crop of medium-sized, purple-flushed figs with sweet and flavoursome yellow-red flesh. Like 'Brown Turkey', it is hardy and suited to cropping outdoors in all but the colder parts of Britain. www.blackmoor.co.uk

'Violette Dauphine'
Large figs with dusky violet skins and sweet, juicy red flesh ripen on hardy plants that thrive in the shelter of sunny walls. Vigorous and productive, plants will need root restriction and pruning to keep them compact. www.otterfarm.co.uk

'White Marseilles'
The large, pear-shaped fruits ripen to a pale, yellow-green and inside the flesh is pale, almost transparent and of sweet, honeyed flavour. The hardy plants have deeply indented leaves. Well worth a try. www.rvroger.co.uk

Rose petal potpourri

The modern definition of potpourri is a mixture of dried, fragrant plant materials, including lavender flowers, rose petals, lemon-scented leaves, jasmine blossoms, lemon peel, cloves and mint. The potpourri of Regency times, however, was often made by layering the ingredients with salt in a jar and leaving them to ferment for a month or even a year before fixatives were added and the scented mix transferred to specially designed pots with perforated lids. The word potpourri actually translated as rotten pot!

I think I'll stick to drying, starting with the 'Roseraie de l'Haÿ' petals gathered on a hot, sunny day. To dry thoroughly, potpourri ingredients should be placed in a single layer on a tray or slatted base and placed somewhere warm, dark and dry, such as an airing cupboard. At home I slid a wide bowl-like plate inside one of those reusable mesh veg bags from the supermarket. Stretched over the top and secured tightly beneath with an elastic band, the mesh allows air to circulate. Opening the cupboard door to turn the petals releases the most glorious scent. After a couple of days, collect the dry petals in a sealable glass jar. Gradually dry and add more rose petals in a variety of colours, plus other scented material and then place in a bowl.

Step by step Drying roses for potpourri

A 'Roseraie de l'Haÿ' flower is gathered on a warm, dry day along with some lemon balm leaves

Spread the scented petals and leaves in a single layer, preferably on a surface allowing air to circulate

Once the petals have been left to dry for a couple of days, seal them in a glass jar and add to them over summer

Chaos gardening

Anyone visiting my garden would think there was enough chaos already, but there's always room for more. The first step was to choose a section of cleared soil in the kitchen garden, ready for raking out into a fine seedbed. If dry, water the area and let it sink in first. The best fun was a raid on the seed tins to tip a few of this and that into a pot. Keeping an eye open for June sowing dates, I found calendula, cosmos, toadflax and ready-mixed annuals. If there was no need to clear the bed in autumn, you could add in biennials and perennials too, such as hollyhocks. Adding veg felt odd but nevertheless spinach, beetroot, carrots and kale were added to the mix. Scattered over the surface and raked in, we'll see what happens next.

Above: Chaos gardening could produce a mixture like this, spotted at RHS Chelsea Flower Show a few years ago. The Fetzer Vineyard Garden showed Californian poppy, poached egg plant, *Phacelia tanacetifolia* and yellow daisy-like lasthenia

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9 of the best biennials

Liz Zorab outlines her choice of the seed to sow in June and July for a blast of colour and interest next year

June and early July are an ideal time to sow seeds of some biennial plants for next year's flower display. Biennials are plants that grow roots and leaves during their first year and then produce flowers and set seed during the second year. There are also perennial plants that are often grown as biennials because they are short-lived as perennials or are likely to succumb to disease if grown into a third year.

Every year I wish I had been more organised the previous year and sown plenty of seeds. So here is a short checklist of some of the biennial seeds you can sow now.

Canterbury bells ring out in a mixed border and Liz found them relatively untroubled by slugs

Campanula medium

Canterbury bells are easy-to-grow biennials with an upright habit that produce a mass of bell-shaped flowers. The petals turn back on themselves creating the effect of the rim of a bell.

I grew a selection of dark purple, pink and white plants when we first moved to our new home. They looked great among other cottage favourites, and some of the plants flowered for two years before dying. Height 75cm (29in) and 30cm (12in) spread.

I valued the colour and interesting flowers highly, but I found that in the very damp spring we had, the foliage was a great hiding place for hungry slugs. While they mostly left the Canterbury bells (*Campanula medium*) alone, they devoured many young plants around them.

Delphinium 'Magic Fountains Lilac Pink' with white bee

These short-lived perennials are often grown as biennials. Give delphinium fertile soil and a sunny, sheltered position and they can provide a tower of flowers. This series offers a more compact plant that reaches around 90cm (3ft) in height from early to late summer. Young growth can be susceptible to slug and snail damage, so try growing them in pots until the plants are 20-25cm (8-10in) tall before planting out into the garden. They should not need staking.

Deadhead flower spikes to encourage it to flower again. Delphinium are available in a wide range of colours including purples, true blues, pinks, reds and whites and the Magic Fountain series are a shorter variety that are ideal for small gardens, pots and windier sites. The 'white bee' refers to the white centre.

Delphinium 'Magic Fountains Lilac Pink' captured at RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2025

Pretty in peach foxgloves on display at RHS Chelsea Flower Show in May

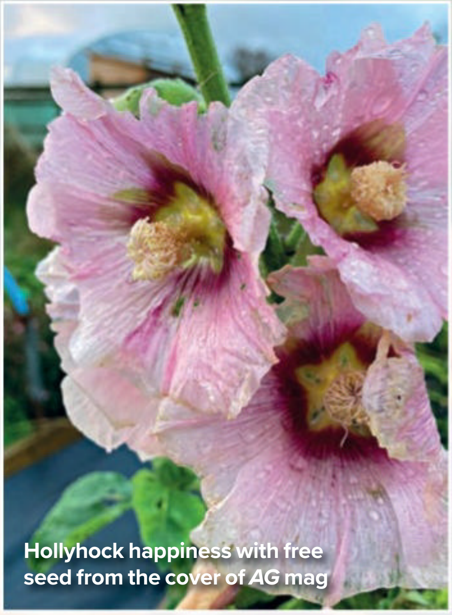
Foxglove (Digitalis spp.)

Foxgloves are easy-to-grow, short-lived perennial or biennial plants. Give them the right conditions of moist but well-drained soil (much like you'd find on the edges of woodland) and *Digitalis purpurea*, the common foxglove, will grow to 1-2m (3-6ft) and seed itself in your garden for years to come.

There are plenty of varieties, offering a wide range of colours and heights; most grow a rosette of leaves in the first year and flower the following year. I think they look best when several are grown together. Remove the flower spike once flowering is finished unless you want to collect seed or allow it to self-seed in your garden.

Be careful when handling as all parts of the plant are poisonous. I spotted these apricot or peach foxgloves at RHS Chelsea last month.

All images unless otherwise credited: Liz Zorab


Hollyhock happiness with free seed from the cover of *AG* mag

Wallflowers are wonderful blooms which come in a range of attractive colours

Liz in her garden with sweet rocket

Alcea rosea

Hollyhocks are short-lived perennials that are easy to grow from seed and make an impressive display in the garden. I like the large pom-pom flowers of *Alcea rosea* 'Chaters Double', which are available in a wide range of colours, and who could resist something as dramatic as the almost black flower of *Alcea rosea* 'Nigra'?

Grow them against a wall or near the back of the border, or position a few plants together in the centre of a bed for a splash of colour that rises above other herbaceous perennials and annual flowering plants. Last year I grew some of the seeds that were free on the front of *Amateur Gardening* and they've already produced some beautiful flowers.

Lunaria annua

The purple or white flowers of honesty appear in late spring, followed by attractive seed pods that open to reveal the seeds against a silvery disc.

This biennial grows to 60cm (2ft) height and 50cm (19.6in) spread. It will self-seed freely, or you can collect the seeds and grow in pots to plant out during the first year.

Honesty grows happily in all but clay soils and is hardy across the UK. I have both the purple and a white, variegated variety because it is such a great doer in the garden.

Erysimum cheiri

Another short-lived perennial that is most often grown as a biennial, wallflowers are not only popular for their cheerful, colourful flowers, but for their sweet scent.

Grow in well-drained, neutral or preferably, alkaline soil. It will struggle to grow in clay soils. *Erysimum cheiri* prefers full sun. Height and spread depend on variety, but expect 40-75cm (15-29.5in) height and 40-60cm (15in to 2ft) spread.

The good news is that if you miss sowing your own seeds, you can often buy young plants in the late summer or autumn to transplant into your garden. Available in a wide range of colours including white, various shades of pink through to dark burgundy red, purples, yellows and oranges.

Hesperis matronalis

Commonly known as sweet rocket, you'll find *Hesperis matronalis* with purple or white flowers. It's ideal for borders where you want fragrance as well as colour, as it fills the surrounding air with a sweet scent. I particularly like the white form, which almost looks like it glows at dusk.

© Shutterstock

Pretty purple flowers and attractive seed pods of honesty

Icelandic poppies at RHS Malvern Spring Festival 2025

It can be grown as a short-lived perennial or biennial and it reaches 90cm (3ft) in height. *Hesperis matronalis* prefers neutral and alkaline soils, in full sun or partial shade, and is hardy across the UK and Ireland.

Oreomecon nudicaulis

Icelandic poppies are easy to grow and often produced as annuals. However, you may get earlier flowering and stronger plants by sowing now for flowering next year.

Sow seeds in biodegradable pots, and plant out with the pot to help reduce root disturbance, or scatter seeds outside where they are to flower. Do not cover the seeds as light helps germination.

Grow in full sun in any soil, except clay. They like well-drained soil in a west- or south-facing position. Height 45-60cm (18in-2ft). Hardy across UK, Ireland and Europe, even during the harshest of winters.

Angelica archangelica

I like the exuberance of this plant in full flower. Despite the tiny, individual flowers being a fairly dull yellowy-green colour, it is the impact of the shape of the umbels and height of the plant that appeals to me.

Angelica archangelica is another perennial that is often grown as a biennial. Height up to 2.5m (8.2ft) and spread 1m (3.3ft). Hardy across the UK and Ireland, it does best in partial shade in moist, but not water-logged, clay or loam soil. For best results, make sure the seeds are fresh or have been stored properly.

Angelica umbrellas create an attractive and rather striking display

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AGHY

Rosie's resilient gardening

3 natural garden improvers

Rosie Irving reveals thrifty ways to help keep your plants and garden in fine fettle

As an organic gardener who likes to save money, I'm constantly looking for natural ways to boost results, and, with this in mind, here are a few suggestions of things that you can do at this time of year...

Rosie is harvesting comfrey leaves to make a fantastic organic plant food

How to make your own comfrey plant food

Plants are like humans. They need nutrients to help them develop and grow well.

The three main wonder nutrients in the plant world are nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium, which you'll see abbreviated on the back of compost packs as N:P:K.

Nitrogen helps the plant produce lush, green leaves; potassium encourages greater production of flowers and fruit and phosphorous concentrates on root development.

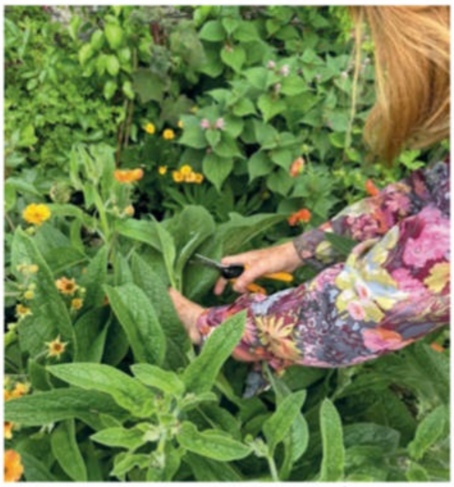
Years ago I discovered the wonderful works of Lawrence Hills, founder of the organisation now known as Garden Organic. He was extremely interested in, and a world authority on, the many virtues of the plant comfrey, especially as a natural plant food.

I think comfrey is a wonder plant! It has high levels of potassium, the main manufactured ingredient in products sold as tomato feed. Potassium also amazingly toughens up the plant, which helps it resist pests and diseases and cope better with extremes of heat and cold.

For these reasons comfrey could make an excellent plant food for your summer flowers, fruit and veg. Any cultivar of comfrey can be used but Lawrence Hills recommended 'Bocking 14', which I use as it produces large leaves and tends to clump rather than self-seed.

The most common way to make comfrey plant food is to soak the leaves in water for two weeks and then use the strained liquid as a spray or drench, but oh my goodness, does that liquid pong; it's super, super smelly!

So I'm delighted to be able to share with you a way of making non-whiff, potassium-rich, concentrated plant food which I discovered from Garden Organic many years ago based on Lawrence Hills' research.


Comfrey plants grow large but even so, don't take too many leaves

All images unless otherwise credited: Rosie Irving

What you'll need

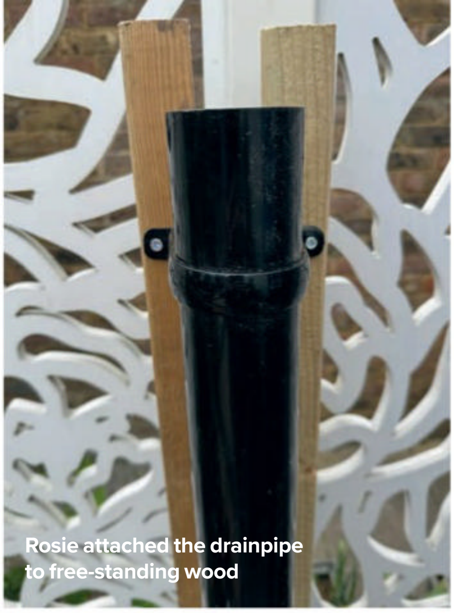
- 2 x lengths of wood approximately 1.5m (5ft) high. I used 5cm x 1cm (2in x 1in) batten
- 1 x length of drainpipe approximately 55cm (22in) long. The piece I used is 7cm (3in) diameter
- 1 x clip on drainpipe clip on bracket (mine cost £1.47)
- 4 x 2.5cm (1in) wood screws
- 1 x piece of wood narrower than the drainpipe diameter (which I call 'the rammer')
- 1 x small wood off-cut approx. 15cm (6in) long and 9cm (3.5in) wide
- 1 x thin piece of wood which will be attached horizontally to the uprights and so needs to be long enough to screw into each upright
- 1 x funnel
- 1 x plant pot with several drainage holes in the bottom wider than the drainpipe diameter
- 1 x empty container. I used an empty 5L water bottle
- 1 x large(ish) stone

It's done by pushing comfrey leaves into a section of drainpipe which, over the course of time, break down and convert into a potassium-rich liquid which drips into a container below it.

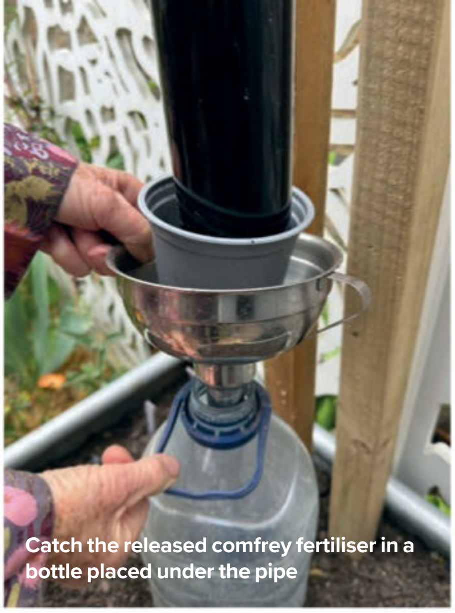
The drainpipe needs to be fixed to a fence, wall or free-standing piece(s) of wood with a raised cover above it to stop rain getting in.

I didn't have a wall or fence available and so opted for the free-standing method. I used two offcuts of wood so that I could screw a clip on to each piece to hold the drainpipe in position.

When you force the comfrey leaves down the pipe they bruise and gradually release their liquid



Rosie attached the drainpipe to free-standing wood



Catch the released comfrey fertiliser in a bottle placed under the pipe

You could use just one piece of wood as long as it's wide enough to accommodate the screws either side of the fixing bracket, but you might need to bury it a bit deeper, about one third of its length, and you'd probably need to screw the drainpipe on to the wood as it's unlikely to be wide enough to screw the drainpipe clip onto.

It's important to keep the cover raised above the top of the drainpipe as this allows air to circulate, and it's the air that stops the leaves smelling as they break down, a process that's missing when leaves are plunged and soaked in water.

How to make it

- Sink each piece of wood into soil to a depth of 30cm (12in) spaced so that the bracket securing the drainpipe can screw into each piece of wood. The bracket I used was 11cm (4in) wide.
- Screw in the narrow off-cut horizontally along the top of the back of the uprights, making sure it holds the pipe firmly in place
- Secure the wood and the clip on the bracket to the drainpipe and then hold the pipe up against the uprights.
- Screw in the bracket on either side of the uprights.
- Place the flowerpot into the funnel. Hold both the flowerpot and funnel under the bottom of, and up close to, the drainpipe with one hand, whilst placing the empty container under the funnel with the other hand so that the funnel nozzle sits in the container.
- Place one of the square off-cuts under the container to keep it steady.
- Pick comfrey leaves and stems, crush and push them into and down to the bottom of the drainpipe using the rammer, filling to the top if you have enough leaves.
- The remaining square wood off-cut should be placed on top of the drain pipe propped up with an off-cut that's at least as wide as the drain pipe so that air can get into the pipe but rain can't. I added a stone to the top in case of windy conditions.
- Depending on weather conditions, the leaves should start to break down and drip a dark liquid into the container within about two weeks. Check the top of the drainpipe regularly, topping up with more leaves and stems when needed, pushing them down firmly with the rammer.
- You will be delighted to discover that this amazing free, liquid plant food does not pong!
- What's more it will store for months on end if kept in a frost-free environment out of direct light.
- To use, dilute approximately one part comfrey liquid to 15 parts water.
- It is a particularly good plant food for tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, berries, and fruit trees.

Other uses for comfrey

- Wilting comfrey leaves are a great way of activating and/or heating up a compost pile due to the speed with which they break down.
- Chopped, wilted leaves can be be used as a 'chop and drop' placed simply on top of soil as a mulch.
- Pollinating insects love the flowers which contain both pollen and nectar.

Did you know?

- Comfrey has been used as a healing herb since at least 400BC. The Greeks and Romans used comfrey to heal wounds and broken bones, giving rise to its nick name of 'knit bone'.
- Nettles are also very high in nitrogen and make a great natural plant food for leafy plants and/or flowering plants whose older leaves have started to turn yellow, usually a sign that the plant needs more nitrogen.
- Growing up, my mother always had a batch of nettle feed on the go but it also stank as, like comfrey, it involved soaking leaves in water for two weeks turning it into an anaerobic process deprived of oxygen.

Rosie harvests elderflowers and leaves and will use the leaves to make a natural powdery mildew cure

Rosie explains how she's planning to help her powdery mildew-affected knautia leaves

Elder leaves to help prevent powdery mildew

Many people gather elder flowers this month to make a delicious cordial. However the wonderful Lawrence Hills discovered that the leaves, when boiled in water and sprayed onto roses, cured powdery mildew on leaves. I've tried it on powdery mildew-affected artichoke leaves and it worked for me so I'm now experimenting on my *Knautia* 'Melton Pastels' which has succumbed to that disease due to the recent very dry weather.

I took about 750g (1.5lbs) of elder leaves and boiled them in 1.4 litres (3 pints) of water for 45 minutes in an old saucepan, (the leaves can stain the base), strained and poured into a bottle with a misting attachment.

Lawrence Hills advised adding soap flakes, (the book was published in 1971 so the equivalent today would be washing up liquid), but I decided against adding it as I'm concerned that may potentially harm pollinating insects such as bees.

I will spray the affected leaves daily, first thing in the morning, for a week and am hoping this will prove to be a natural cure.

I'm not aware of any adverse effects of elder leaf water but, to be on the safe side, if you try this please label the bottle clearly and keep it out of reach of children and animals. It should keep for up to a month if stored in a cool, dry place out of direct sunlight.

Garlic solution for national pest control

When filming with Christine Walkden for the BBC series *Glorious Gardens from Above*, we visited Powis Castle where the head gardener showed her how his team sprayed their roses with a garlic solution to keep the plants healthy and relatively free from pests and diseases.

How to make it

Below is the recipe for making it courtesy of Sienna Hosta and Mike Palmer.

- Add two bulbs of garlic to 2 litres (4.2 pints) of water in an old saucepan.
- Boil until soft and then squash with the back of a fork to release as much juice as possible.
- Sieve and bottle the liquid and don't forget to label it!
- Dilute two tablespoons to 5 litres (8.8 pints) of water in a mister or watering can.
- Spray weekly and/or immediately after rain, ideally first thing in the morning or late afternoon.

Sienna Hosta uses this spray to deter slugs and snails, and, in addition to that and disease control on roses, some academic studies have found it to be effective in deterring aphid infestations.

It can be used on vegetables and/or flowering plants.

You can follow more of Rosie's thrifty adventures on instagram **@rosieposieirving**

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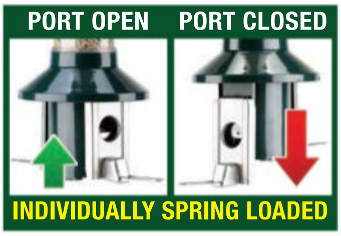

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Your GARDENING TEA BREAK

Gardening's king of trivia and brain-teasers, **Graham Clarke**

Oranges and lemons

Globally, citrus fruits are among the most popular of plants. Commercially they produce fruits worth billions, and they are grown in their millions at homes across the globe for their decorative qualities. And, here in the UK, we can even harvest our own oranges and lemons in our own gardens!

Citrus fruits belong to the rue family (Rutaceae). The high juice content makes them crucial for the drinks industry, and the large citrus diversity, as well as the variety of things you can do with them in the kitchen, keeps their demand high.

Fruit or colour?

Rather like the old conundrum 'which came first, the chicken or the egg?', the question has often been asked: which came first, the colour called 'orange' or the fruit by the same name? Actually, it's easy: the colour was named after the fruit. The fruit came first — by around 300 years! In Anglo manuscript of the 13th century, the old French words *pomme d'orenge*, referring to the fruit, are found. The use of the word to describe the colour is not noted until the 16th century.

- The typical yellow of lemons, and the orange colour of oranges, appear when the nights become cooler. In fact, the pigment used in each is a kind of 'antifreeze' that protects the fruits from frost damage.

Wow! I didn't know that...

- The first 'conservatory' was built in 1562 at Burghley Court in Northants, by Queen Elizabeth I's Chief Secretary of State, William Cecil. It housed Cecil's collection of orange and lemon trees (as well as myrtles and pomegranates), and was known as Orange Court. It is thought to be the first of the grand 'orangeries'.
- Oranges and lemons smell different due to chemically identical molecules – but which are mirror images of each other.
- Many Japanese companies add lemon essence to their air-conditioning systems, to increase the concentration capabilities of their employees.

This fortnight in gardening history

10 June 1858 Botanist Robert Brown, an early user of microscopes to identify plant cells, died at the age of 84. He had been on several botanical expeditions with Monty Don's four-times-great-grandfather George, a prominent nurseryman!

16 June 1975 American Randy Farland found a 14-leaved white clover (*Trifolium repens*) near Sioux Falls, South Dakota. As the name *trifolium* – or trifoliated – suggests, the leaves usually come in sets of three. See below!

18 June 1835 British-born William Cobbett, writer and horticultural economist, died. He had been an MP and an outspoken supporter of reform, to the extent that he fled to the US in fear for his safety. There, in exile, he wrote *The American Gardener*, one of the earliest gardening books to be published in the US.

22 June 1987 American Paul Haizlip reported a 14-leaved red clover (*Trifolium pratense*) at Bellevue, Washington.

All images © Shutterstock

Crossword... *just for fun!*

1		2			■	3		4		5
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7										
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13										
	■		■	■		■	■		■	
14					■	15				

ACROSS

1 Fast-growing crop grown simultaneously with or between successive plantings of a main crop (5)

3 This guide or guard on machinery is also a thin, human-constructed barrier which separates two pieces of land (5)

7 In botany, suggesting that a plant's leaves usually come in sets of three (11)

8 Alternative common name for the tropical baby pepper (*Rivina humilis*) (11)

9 The genus of the tender Cape cowslip (10)

13 A plant of the trichomanes genus is known as this (7,4)

14 County home of the famous RHS Garden at Hyde Hall (5)

15 Vessels containing water, and in which one displays cut flowers (5)

DOWN

1 Provide people with food and drink, but in front of a pillar you get grub! (5)

2 Branches – but ones which flow into main streams, rivers or lakes! (11)

4 The quality or state of not be caused or created by mankind! (11)

5 Current of air running contrary to the main current, and which can cause damage in the garden (4)

6 The Root Disease of Brassicas Association! (4)

10 In fennel lentils is a lifestyle magazine (of French origin) focusing on fashion, beauty, health and entertainment! (4)

11 The alder genus (5)

12 Skilful and, when following 'veget', becomes edible! (4)

ANSWERS TO CROSSWORD ABOVE

ACROSS 1 Catch 3 Fence 7 Trifoliated 8 Rougeberry 9 Lachenalia 13 Bristle fern 14 Essex 15 Vases **DOWN** 1 Cater 2 Tributaries 4 Naturalness 5 Eddy 6 Club 10 Elle 11 Alnus 12 Able

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When removing non invasive weeds know that they can be cold composted. Just soak seed heads and roots in water for a number of weeks before adding to your heap to return goodness to the soil

© Shutterstock

How to work with weeds

Garden Organic's research manager **Dr Anton Rosenfeld** shows you how to better appreciate your weeds and explains how they can signify garden conditions

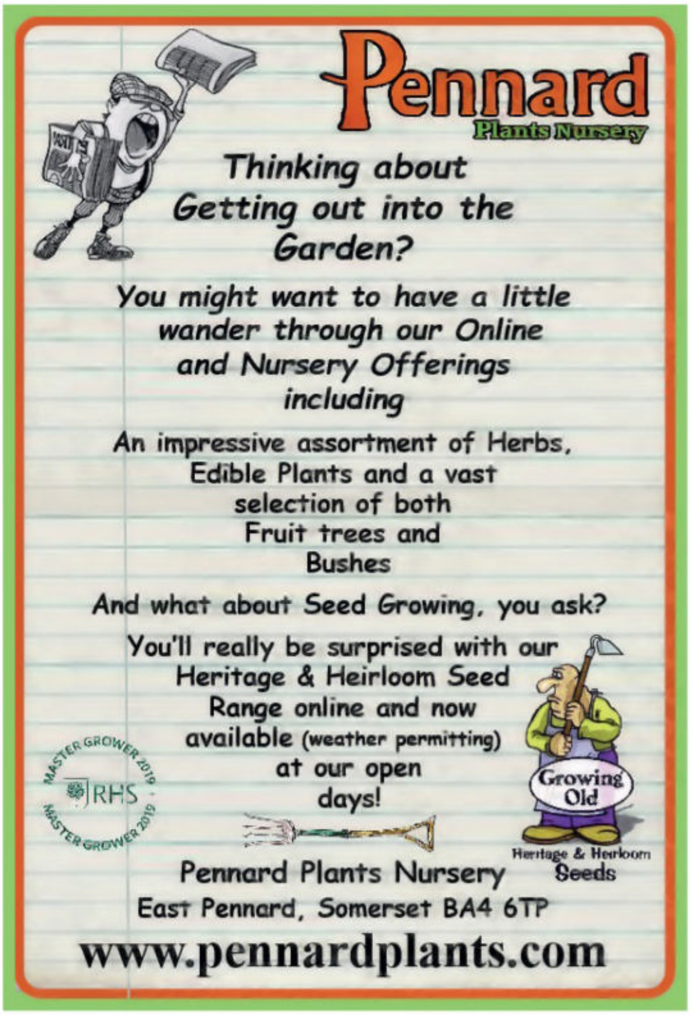
All image unless stated © Garden Organic

Ask people what a weed is and the most common answer will be: 'it's a plant growing where it's not wanted'. While some plants might not be welcome in all places, an understanding of the many benefits that wild plants or weeds can bring might allow us to be a little bit more generous in our attitudes towards them.

For example, a less ruthless weeding regime can bring many benefits including providing pollen and nectar for pollinating insects. There are some, such as the humble dandelion, that provide large amounts of pollen and nectar for feeding, usually at a time of year when not much else is flowering.

Weeds can also protect the soil. Leaving a cover of non-evasive annual weeds such as chickweed over winter has been shown to be much better than leaving it bare. It protects the soil from weather damage and erosion and stops the rain from washing out all the nutrients. It also provides a habitat where predatory insects such as ladybirds can overwinter, ensuring they will be ready and waiting the following spring to devour pests such as aphids.

Weeds provide vital pollen and nectar for pollinating insects



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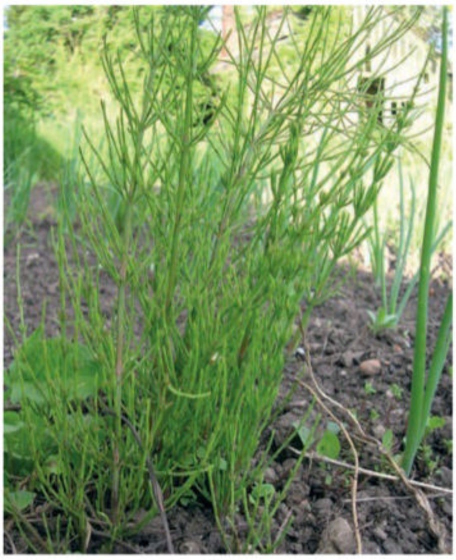
What weeds can tell you about your soil

As some weeds seem to thrive better in different soils, the presence of certain plants can give an interesting indication as to your soil type and conditions.

Hard surface crust

Moss is likely to thrive on soils with a hard crust as they are likely to have a thin layer of water on the surface for much of the year. Poor surface drainage is often caused when soil is left bare over winter, so particles become congealed together to form a 'cap'. It can be prevented by adding a layer of compost or leafmould, or growing a green manure such as vetch to cover the ground, which should reduce the moss problem.

Soggy soils



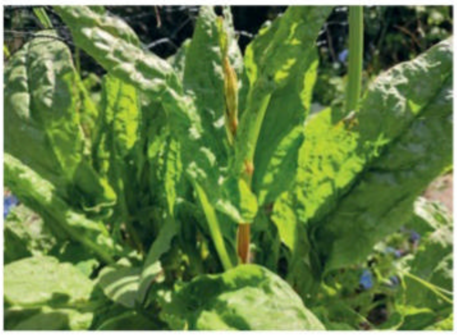
A damp soggy place is where horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*) can take hold. It propagates through deep underground rhizomes and also produces large numbers of spores. If you can improve the drainage through use of green manures or adding well-rotted compost, you will have less of a battle on your hands, although you will most likely never get rid of it completely.

Compacted soil

© Shutterstock

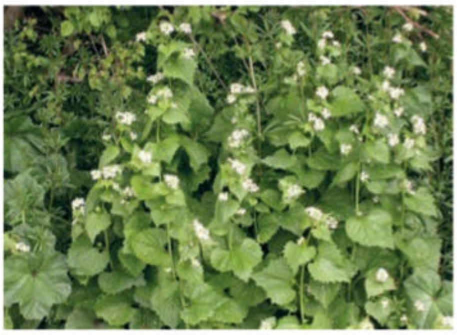
Dandelions (*Taraxacum spp*) are a perennial weed with a large taproot, so they're better able to withstand compacted soil than other plants. A green manure with a tap root such as alfalfa (or lucerne) will help to break this up. It's always good to leave a few dandelions around to benefit pollinators in the early spring.

Acidic soil



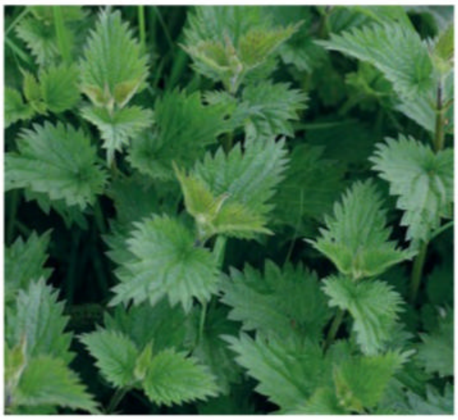
Sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*) is one of the many weeds that will grow well on acidic soils. It is a perennial so, once established, it takes quite an effort to dig up the tap root. Cut off the flowering head in early summer to avoid it seeding and spreading further. The leaves are edible and have a citrus tang that livens up a salad - but they contain oxalic acid, so should only be consumed in moderation.

Alkaline soil



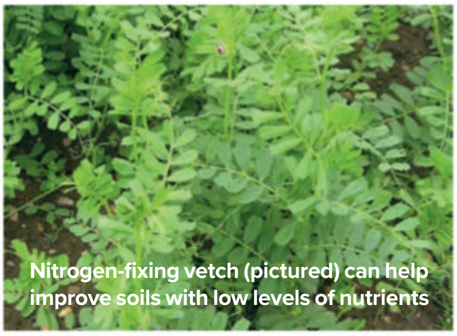
Garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*) thrives on soils that are neutral to alkaline, so if you see this around, it's a good indication that your soil is well suited for growing vegetables. Garlic mustard lives up to its name with a peppery mustard flavour accompanied by a whiff of garlic. It's great mixed in with a salad or if you need to pep up a sandwich.

Nutrient-rich soil



Nettles (*Urtica dioica*) are one of the best indicators of a fertile soil. They have many benefits, including providing food for the caterpillars of our favourite butterflies, such as the red admiral and peacock. If you're hungry, young nettles also make a good spinach alternative for use in soup or pasta dishes.

Low nutrient soil



Nitrogen-fixing vetch (pictured) can help improve soils with low levels of nutrients

You may see weeds of the legume family such as white clover (*Trifolium repens*) or vetch (*Vicia sativa*) in this kind of soil, and they will have a significant advantage over everything else as they are able to fix their own nutrients. Vetch is pretty easy to remove when needed, but white clover forms a network of rhizomes, which it uses to spread.

For more advice on organic gardening head to **www.gardenorganic.org.uk**, where you can also find out how to become a member and support the charity.

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THE YEAR-ROUND KITCHEN GARDEN

With **Stephanie Hafferty**

Easy summer vegetable delight

Stephanie Hafferty reveals how to make this delicious one-pan dish with orzo and feta

Stephanie explains how to make this wholesome meal with fresh garden vegetables

I first came across this baked orzo and feta dish when my daughter made it for me. Impressed with the delicious creaminess and ease of cooking, it's become a firm favourite in our house. I love how versatile it is, lending itself to most of the veg and herbs I grow here in the garden.

The orzo - small pasta shapes that resemble large grains of rice - soaks up the flavours as it cooks, and the feta becomes gooey and creamy, creating an indulgent sauce.

This one-dish meal can go straight from the oven to the table, saving on washing up. Any leftovers make a delicious lunch the next day.

Tip: Feta is a salty cheese so it is best to go easy on the salt seasoning during cooking.

Ingredients

Feeds 2 hungry people

- 250g orzo
- 200g cherry tomatoes (or larger tomatoes, diced)
- 2 to 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 medium red onions
- 1 courgette
- 1 sweet pepper
- 1 teacup measure of cooked broadbeans
- 200g block of feta
- olive oil
- 1 lemon, juice and zest
- 500ml hot vegetable stock or water, plus extra if needed
- sea salt and pepper
- 4 tbsp chopped fresh seasonal herbs eg: oregano, basil, parsley, mint
- Ovenproof dish approx 20x35cm

You can use a mixture of summer vegetables for this delicious dish

Broad beans work well in this dish

A great recipe for using up a glut of courgettes

Method

- Preheat the oven to 180°Fan/200°C/ Gas mark 6
- Total cooking time: 45 minutes
- Chop the onions, courgette and sweet pepper into bite-sized pieces. Place in the ovenproof dish with the garlic and tomatoes. Season with pepper and a little salt.
- Drizzle olive oil over and mix to coat the veg. Place in the oven and cook for 15 minutes to soften the veg and release the flavours.
- Next, add the lemon juice and zest, 3 tbsp of herbs, orzo pasta and 500 ml of hot water (or stock). Stir to combine everything and place back into the oven for a further 20 minutes.
- The orzo should have absorbed most of the liquid and be tender to the bite. Add a little extra hot water if needed.
- Place the feta in the centre of the dish, drizzle with a little extra olive oil and sprinkle over 1 tbsp herbs.
- Place in the oven for 10 more minutes.
- Mix the feta through the veg and orzo and serve. (Or serve with the feta intact if you prefer.)
- I like this with warm crusty bread popped in the oven with the orzo bake for the final 10 minutes, and a green salad.

Veggies: Veg which works well includes: aubergine, spinach, chard, peas, asparagus, summer squash, winter squash, leek.

Tip: When boiling the kettle to make the stock/boiling water, pour an extra 100ml or so into a vacuum flask. This saves having to boil the kettle again if the dish needs a little extra liquid.

Extras: Add a drained tin of chickpeas or a handful of olives to the dish at the same time as the orzo

Vegan: To make this dish vegan, use a vegan feta

For more recipe, gardening and course information from Stephanie see **www.nodighome.com**

All images unless otherwise credited: Stephanie Hafferty

GROWING FROM SEED

with **Ruth Hayes**, *AG*'s gardening expert

'My Fair Lady' is a classy border beauty

Subtle colours make this wallflower a springtime garden must-have

I love a plant that's easy to grow, yet thanks you for its care with a profusion of flowers and scent that far outweighs the amount of work that's gone into raising it.

Most biennials come to mind when I think of generous growing and one of the best is the wallflower.

Sown in midsummer and planted out in autumn, these hardy favourites delight with an array of enticing colours and a rich, spicy perfume.

Some flower in deep, dramatic colours that command attention, while others, such as 'My Fair Lady Mixed' produce a more subtle palette of yellow, apricot, mauve and rose.

Biennials are plants that start growing one year, then bloom, set seed and die back the next. Wallflowers are in fact short-lived perennials, but we usually grow them as biennials, and if wise, collect the seeds when they ripen to sow ourselves.

Interestingly, young wallflower shoots can be harvested, cooked and eaten as a vegetable - but always check with a health professional before trying this yourself.

Above: The gentle colours of wallflower 'My Fair Lady Mixed' will brighten a spring border

Sow the seeds thinly onto a tray of good quality, sieved, peat-free seed compost that has been dampened with fresh tapwater, then cover with a thin layer of vermiculite.

Pot on the seedlings into individual pots when they are large enough to handle safely, then plant them outside in the autumn in the spot where you want them to flower next spring.

Alternatively, sow your wallflower seeds directly into a prepared seedbed outside. If necessary, thin the seedlings to 15 to 23cm (6 to 9in) apart and then transplant them to their final spot, planting them 30 to 38cm (12 to 15in) apart.

The plants won't do much through winter, but once the temperature rises in spring they will surge ahead and flower fantastically.

All images credit: © Shutterstock

A drop of milky coffee

'Café Crème' is an unusual foxglove

- Foxgloves are another popular biennial - I love their stately spires, which is just as well as they grow well in our chalky soil.
- An unusual variety that I can't wait to try is 'Café Crème', which produces tall towers of milky coffee-coloured flowers, each with a freckled inside and pearl-white lower lip.
- Also known as 'woolly foxglove' for their slightly fuzzy appearance, these will flower from late spring until midsummer and are a popular strain for flower arrangers as they last well in a vase.
- It will grow to 60cm (2ft) with a 30cm (1ft) spread.
- The seeds should be sown in summer in fine, sieved compost and the seedlings are potted on when large enough to handle.
- You can either plant them out in the autumn or keep them undercover until the frosts have passed in spring. Plant them 45cm (18in) apart.
- They are woodland plants so will thrive in dappled shade, though they can also tolerate sun. Their soil should be kept damp.

Digitalis lanata 'Café Crème' is also known as the woolly foxglove

What's On

10-14 June: Great Big Green Week 2025, venues and events nationwide. See greatbiggreenweek.com for full details.
12-15 June: BBC Gardeners' World Live, NEC, Birmingham, B40 1NT. (Includes the International Orchid Show.) 9am-6pm.
12-15 June: Plant Heritage Plant Stall, Heneage Farm, Windlesham Road, Chobham, Surrey, GU24 8QR.
13-15 June: Royal Three Counties Show, Three Counties Showground, Malvern, Worcestershire, WR13 6NW.
13-22 June: Pashley Manor Gardens Rose Week, Pashley Manor Gardens, Ticehurst, near Wadhurst, East Sussex, TN5 7HE.
13 June: Lancaster's Midsummer Market, Market Square, Market Street, Lancaster, Lancashire, LA1 1AL. 10am-5pm.
14 June: Early Summer Workshop & Walled Garden Tour - Cutting Garden, Balgove Larder Farm Shop, Strathtyrum, St Andrews, Fife KY16 9SF.
14-15 June: Unusual Plants Fair, Gilbert White's House and Garden, The Wakes, Selborne, Alton, Hampshire, GU34 3JH. 10.30am-5pm.
14 June: Plant Heritage Specialist Plant and Garden Fair at Ushaw Garden, Ushaw Historic House, Chapels & Gardens, Woodland Road, Ushaw Moor, County Durham, DH7 7DW. 10am-3pm.
14-15 June: Cerne Abbas Open Gardens, Cerne Abbas, near Dorchester, Dorset, DT2 7GD.
15 June: Rare Plant Fair, Lamport Hall, Lamport, Northamptonshire, East Midlands, (NN6 9EZ for satnav).
20-22 June: Rose Weekend, Craft & Food Market, RHS Garden Rosemoor, Great Torrington, Devon, EX38 8PH.
20-21 June: Summer Plant Fair, RHS Garden Harlow Carr, Crag Lane, Beckwithshaw, Harrogate, North Yorkshire, HG3 1QB.
21 June: Plant Fairs Roadshow, Horniman Museum and Gardens, 100 London Road, Forest Hill, London, SE23 3PQ.
22 June: Plant Hunters' Summer Fair, Middleton Hall, Middleton, Tamworth, Staffordshire, West Midlands, B78 2AE.

Dates and times are correct when going to press. Thanks to **pumpkinbeth.com** for the listings - check her site for more details. Please send us details of your events at least six weeks in advance to **editor@amateurgardening.com** Always check events are going ahead before leaving home.

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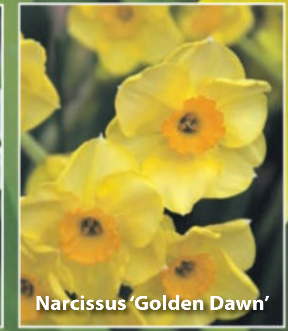
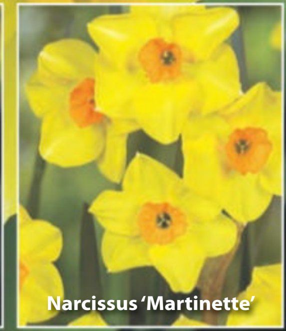


Narcissus 'Golden Dawn'



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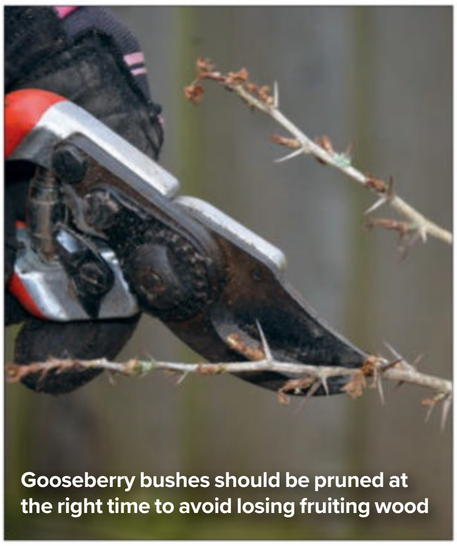
Ask JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions

Why do our gooseberries never fruit?

Correct pruning and feeding are so important for success



Gooseberry bushes should be pruned at the right time to avoid losing fruiting wood

Q We inherited three gooseberry bushes when we moved house a few years ago. They are growing well but have never produced any fruit - what are we doing wrong?
Clare Runackres (via email)

A I am sorry to hear that your gooseberries haven't fruited. Presumably, they are mature bushes and should be cropping well.

You may be pruning them incorrectly, cutting off shoots which would have borne fruit.

The correct time to prune gooseberries is from mid-autumn, when leaves fall, to early March, and again in late June when side shoots are shortened to four or five leaves.

Then again they may have been given excessively nitrogen-rich fertiliser/manure which would encourage leaf growth at the expense of fruiting shoots.

Another cause of their being barren is lack of adequate potassium, which is necessary for bushes to fruit well.

If you are pruning bushes correctly, I suspect that they are lacking potassium (potash). Overcome this by feeding with sulphate of potash and reapply it monthly until September.

How can I remove wild onions?

Q I think some invasive onions have invaded our garden. Their leaves are thin and they have clusters of white flowers. They seem impossible to remove - what should I do?
Nancy Bennet (via email)

A They sound like *Allium triquetrum* (also known as three-cornered garlic) which, though attractive and edible, can spread rapidly.

The problem is they propagate via bulblets and the stems often break when you are pulling them up, leaving bulbs in situ.

If you need to remove them you have two best options:

1. Try and dig them out, carefully so the bulbs don't snap off.

2. If this is too much of an effort, trample them to break the leaves then cover with cardboard or weed suppressing fabric topped with soil or bark chips. This will exclude sunlight and they will eventually die off, though it may take a year or two.

I would advise against composting removed plants to avoid spreading them even further.

Above: *Allium triquetrum* (three-cornered garlic) is a more invasive member of the allium family

Quick questions & answers

Evergreens are cut back when the weather starts to warm up

Can I cut back our euonymus?

Q When should I cut back my euonymus?
Marcus Allen, Berks

A I suggest that you trim your euonymus now, removing no more than 30cm (12in) of growth. Ideally, use hedging shears and shape them neatly into rounded mounds.

New shoots will form quickly, especially if we get some early summer showers.

No further clipping should be necessary until the same time next year.

What is the name of this carpet plant?

Q What is this please?
Laura Francis (via email)

A The carpeter in question appears to be a species of knotweed (persicaria), probably *P. campanulata*.

A native of N. India, N. Burma and S. W. China, it's ideal for covering lightly shaded areas around or under trees and shrubs.

You may have the variety 'Southcombe White', whose reflective blooms are a delight. The only problem is that it can quickly rampage beyond its allotted space, so it occasionally needs cutting back.

Right: Persicaria is an attractive ground cover plant but can become unruly

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Ask JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions

How do I grow shrubby plumbago?

This hardy shrub likes a sheltered, fertile spot

Q I would like to add a blue shrub to my garden and someone suggested plumbago. How should I go about it?
Tom Keans, West London

A Shrubby plumbago or *Ceratostigma plumbaginoides* is a popular hardy shrub, much loved for its profusion of blue flowers and the way its leaves turn red or purple in the autumn.

It is a low-growing plant that is good for ground cover and needs little maintenance other than a trim in early spring.

Although they are hardy, they like a sunny, sheltered spot and will also grow well in containers.

Shrubby plumbago likes fertile, free-draining soil so dig in lots of well-rotted organic matter before planting, or if grown in a container, use good quality peat-free compost and top dress every spring, repotting in fresh compost as necessary.

*Ceratostigma plumbag*inoides is a hardy shrub that is excellent ground cover

The shrubs can be propagated by softwood cuttings in late spring and semi-ripe cuttings in summer.

Ceratostigma plumbaginoides is widely available from garden centres and also from Burncoose Nurseries in Cornwall at www.burncoose.co.uk, call 01209 860316

Can I deep-plant my leggy seedlings?

Q Some of my seedlings are quite leggy now and need to be potted on. Can I bury part of the lower stems and leaves or will this just make them rot?
Colin Salter (via email)

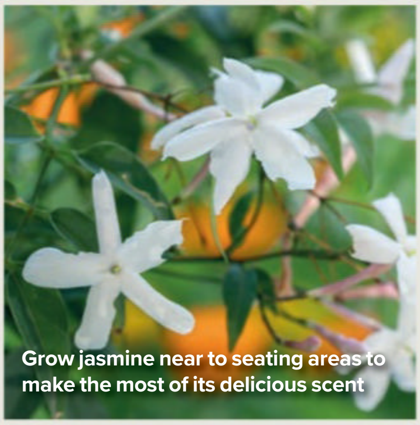
A I am sorry that your seedlings are becoming leggy, presumably because they are being grown indoors, or in a heated greenhouse, and need to be potted on and re-sited where they will receive more light.

Apart from tomatoes and a few other plants whose young stems won't rot if buried, the majority are best planted covering only the root system, leaving stems exposed to light and air.

Above: **It is better to pinch out seedlings than plant them too deeply**

Pleasingly, if we are talking about summer-bedding plants which have made side shoots, you can behead them to leave them to 'bush out' and become stocky.

Quick questions & answers



Grow jasmine near to seating areas to make the most of its delicious scent

An easy-going perfumed beauty

Q What is this pretty climber please? It smells gorgeous.
Josie Evans (via email)

A It is common jasmine (*Jasminum officinale*), a splendidly fragrant, summer-flowering species.

It prefers full sun or light shade, and likes rich soil that drains well. A fast-grower, if it is outgrowing its situation, cut back flowered shoots to strong new growth when blooms fade.

For continued healthy growth, feed monthly with a general-purpose fertiliser, forking it in and then watering.

Ivy is a beneficial garden plant

Q Could you please tell me how to get rid of ivy?
Maria Bowen (via email)

A Apart from clipping off questing ivy shoots rampaging over your garden, the best way keep your ivy hedge neat and appealing is to cut it back and pull up the roots - they are usually quite shallow and easy to remove.

However, bear in mind that ivy is a valuable resource for wildlife. The flowers provide nectar, the berries are autumn and winter food for birds and many insects and invertebrates hibernate within it, so please don't remove it all.

Left: Ivy is so valuable to all forms of wildlife

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Ask JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions

What is the best way to fill a raised bed?

Good drainage and rich soil are key requirements

Q We have built two raised beds for vegetable growing. What should we fill them with before planting?
Sue and Alan Brookes, Gloucestershire

A I am delighted that you have constructed very practical, deep raised beds - you will be able to grow lots of wonderful things in them.

Ideally, fork over the base to loosen any compacted subsoil, then fill in with 30cm (12in) of crushed hardcore, stones or rubble as good drainage is vitally important.

If you constructed them on a grassy area, you can then add the removed turf, turned upside down so the grass doesn't re-root. This will decompose over time.

Finally, add a mix of equal parts top quality soil, homemade compost if possible and well-rotted composted manure. If you have access to leaf mould, add some of that too to help enrich and open up the soil.

Before planting, rake in a generous quantity of fish, blood and bone meal to speed robust growth and help build the soil's humus content, invaluable for encouraging beneficial worms and micro-organisms.

Don't worry if the contents of the beds sink over the course of the year - this is natural and can be remedied by topping them up with fresh compost in autumn or spring before you start growing again.

Fertile raised beds are a treasure when it comes to growing a multitude of crops

Please can you ID this Greek beauty?

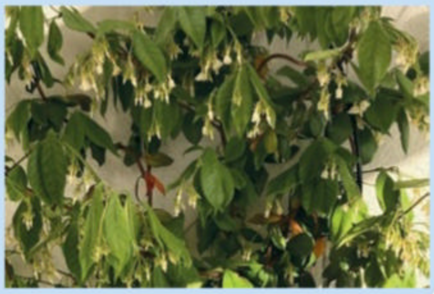
Q On holiday to Kefalonia I found a plant which I like to grow but I am not sure if this one is available in the UK. I have added a few pictures - can you help me?
Jan Schut (via email)

A It appears to be night-blooming jasmine, botanically *Cestrum nocturnum*. Best grown in a sunny spot indoors or in a conservatory, its flowers, which open in the evening and continue to bloom for several hours, have great charm.

Provided you position it on a drip tray filled with pea shingle and water and liquid-feed it regularly to keep the potting compost just damp, it should thrive for you.

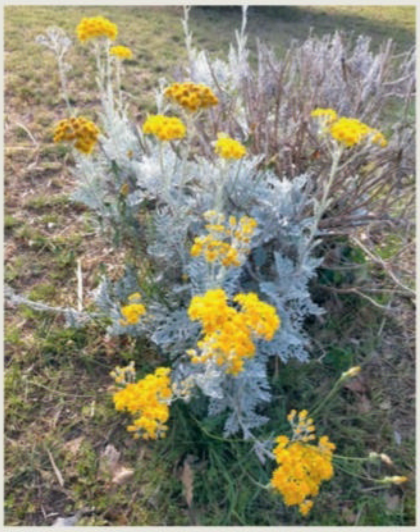
If your local garden centre doesn't sell it, contact the following companies who normally stock it:

Cross Common Nursery:
www.crosscommonnursery.co.uk.
Tel: 01326 290 722
Burncoose Nurseries:
www.burncoose.co.uk.
Tel: 01209 860 316
Shrubland Park Nurseries:
www.shrublandparknurseries.co.uk.
Tel: 01473 657 012



Above: Night-blooming jasmine is best grown indoors or somewhere very sheltered

Quick questions & answers



An unnamed silver stunner

Q I bought this from a plant sale but it had no label. Can you enlighten me?
P Durrant (via email)

A The very attractive foliage plant appears to be silver ragwort (*Jacobaea maritima*) also called *Senecio cineraria*. A native of the Mediterranean, forms of it vary slightly.

Your plant is very impressive and is obviously flourishing. It is a great addition to patio containers and provides an elegant foil to exuberant summer colours.

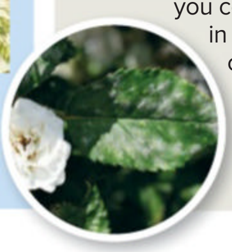
Beating mildew on roses

Q How can I stop powdery mildew affecting our roses?
R. Symonds, Bristol

A Powdery mildew is common when the soil is dry and there is poor airflow.

The best way to combat it is to remove and bin affected leaves, then water and feed your roses to boost their strength and resilience.

Make sure they are not crowded out by other plants and weeds, and when you come to prune them in autumn, cut away old crowded stems.



Left: Powdery mildew is a common problem in close, dry conditions

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Thrifty plant protection

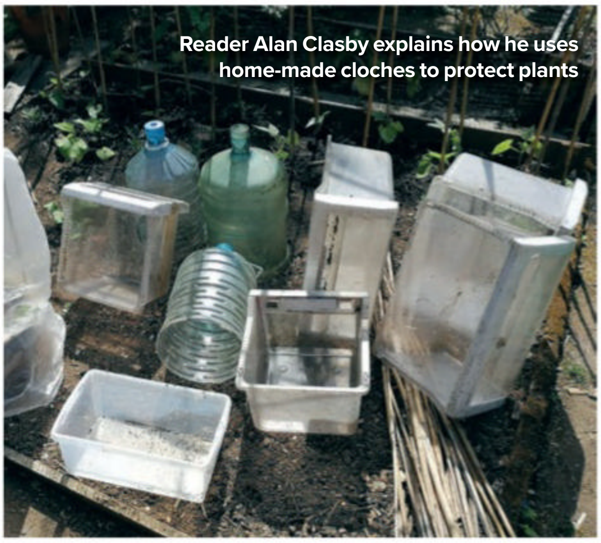
Hi Kim
How many people hear about hardening off plants, but do not have cloches to easily achieve it. The picture shows a number of 'no-cost' cloches, these allow the hardening off, or planting out, or later protection of tender plants

The picture shows all the cloches I have now finished using.

These cloches are basically things like transparent drawers from fridges/freezers, large water bottles with the bottoms cut off, or even any transparent box base, not forgetting, even clear plastic bags. All these and possibly others you can dream up, are ideal to help your plants overcome the change in temperature early and later in the year.

Best regards,
Alan Clasby, Dorset

Kim says; that's brilliant Alan, thank you for sharing. It's so rewarding to turn such items into useful gardening equipment over and over again.



Reader Alan Clasby explains how he uses home-made cloches to protect plants

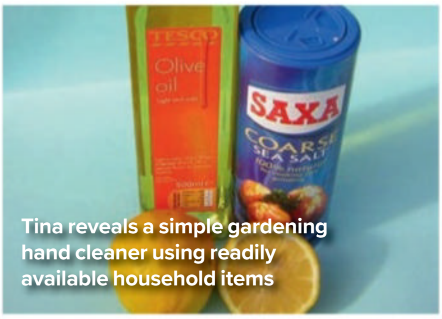
Home-made gardening hand scrub

Hello Kim,
I'd like to share this tip with other *AG* readers if I may:

There is no need to buy expensive hand scrubs to use after gardening. a combination of sea salt, lemon juice and olive oil works just as well. Whitening and softening dirt ingrained hands

Mrs Tina C Vowles

Kim says; what a lovely idea Tina, thank you for writing in. What other materials do readers use for impromptu hand care after gardening I wonder? I'd love to hear. Please do write in.



Tina reveals a simple gardening hand cleaner using readily available household items

© Shutterstock

John explains how he's started using a rose on his watering can

Watering wisely

Kim
I have quite a few water butts which have saved lots of water which would otherwise have literally gone down the drain.

I have a lot of pots to keep watered. The recent dry spell has seen my reserve of water diminishing. I began to think about ways in which to make my water last longer. I had always just used a can with no rose, seeing the water run through the pots and away. I tried a small rose on the end of the can you see if it made any difference. Eureka! The soil in the pots is now more evenly watered as opposed to running away down the middle of the pot. The plants are still thriving and I now use one can instead of four!

John Michael Edwards

Kim says; that's excellent to hear John - thank you for sharing. Using a rose on your watering can will also be gentler for the soil and the plants.

Squirrel deterrent

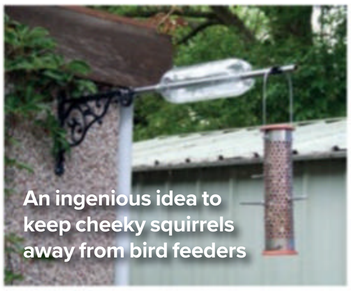
Hello Kim,
I hung an extra bird feeder from my shed.

To deter the squirrels I threaded on empty lemonade bottle along the horizontal bar.

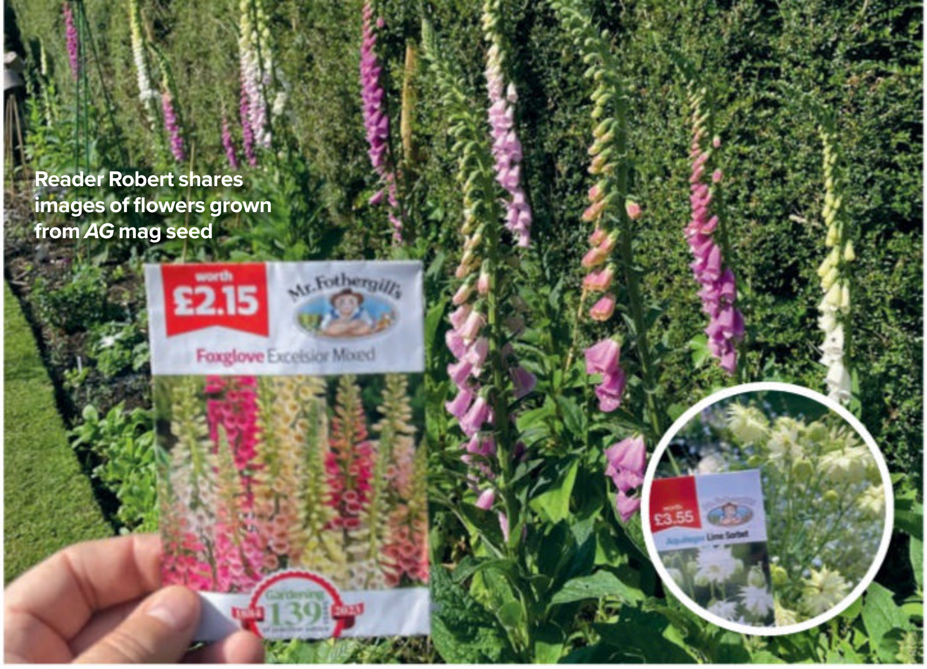
When they try to reach the food it spins round and they fall off.

Mrs Carol Casan
Devon

Kim says; that's a great idea Carol. Squirrels are so acrobatic, this will keep them safely at bay, and the birds get to enjoy the extra feeder for themselves.



An ingenious idea to keep cheeky squirrels away from bird feeders


Reader Robert shares images of flowers grown from *AG* mag seed

Blooming marvellous free seed success

Dear Kim
We are currently enjoying a particularly glorious spell of weather at the moment here in Ireland.

My garden is definitely benefiting from the extra sunshine and I thought you and the readers might be interested to see the success I had with two packets of seeds from one of last year's *AG* magazines.

The foxgloves have certainly lived up to their name of Excelsior and are majestic .

The 'Lime Sorbet' aquilegias have been an unusual delight and much admired .

Thank you again for the seeds with each magazine and best wishes for a productive and enjoyable summer of gardening

Kind regards
Robert Galbraith

Kim says; they look lovely Robert, thank you so much for sharing.

Please send us your letters, poems and musings

Your contribution is such an important part of this magazine for the future.

AG is for you the people, for gardeners and proud custodians of gardens everywhere, so please do write in.

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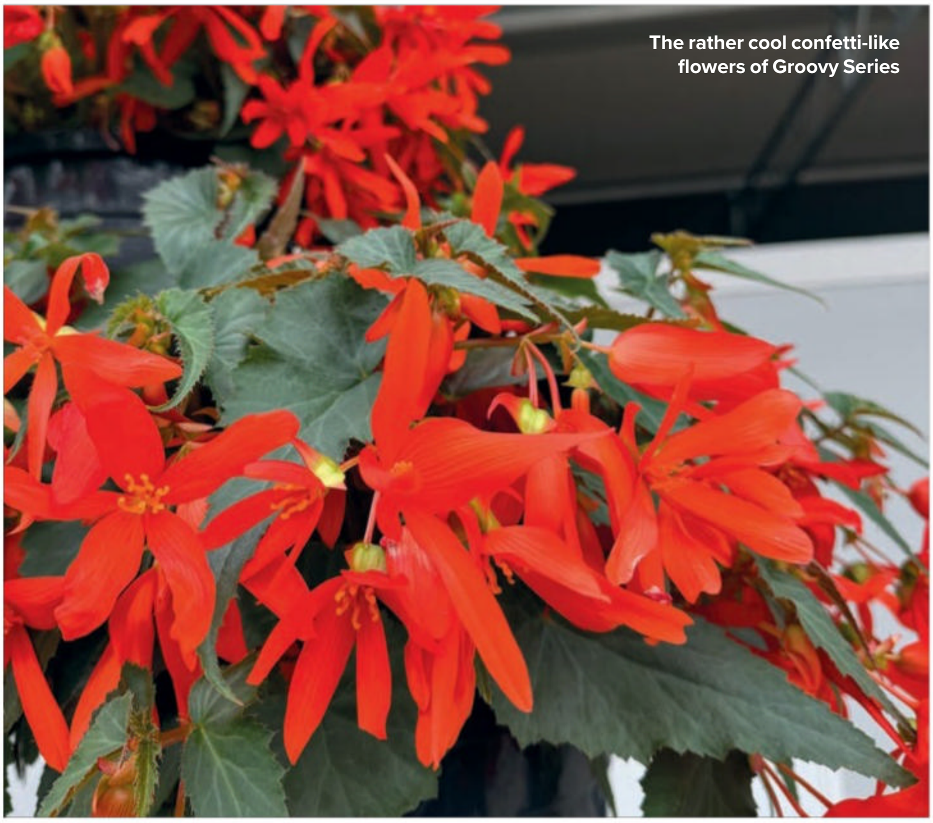
PLANT WATCH

With **Michael Perry**

Exciting recommendations from our expert plantsman



The rather cool confetti-like flowers of Groovy Series

6 of the best begonias

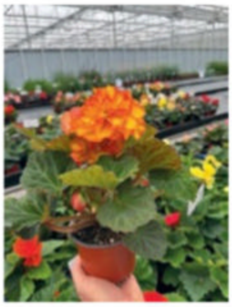
Michael gets excited by new varieties of this long summer-flowering faithful

I love begonias and I'm not even ashamed of it! Some people out there think they're not very trendy anymore, but I don't mind because they give me colour and joy. And, they also bloom for about five months of the year, and how many other plants do that?

Did you know that some of the best begonias are bred in Germany, by a company called Benary? They began many years ago with the Non-Stop Series, which you have no doubt heard of. I visited them recently to see their latest developments.

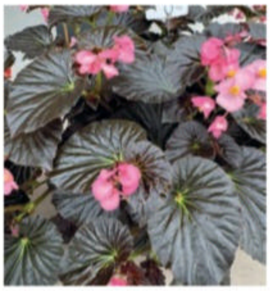
Groovy Series

This is a really, really superb hanging begonia with really interesting little flowers that are almost like confetti. The colour range is as tropical as you can imagine, but my favourite is the vibrant orangey-red in the main picture. Excellent for window boxes, and very useful for shady balcony corners.



Non-Stop Flame

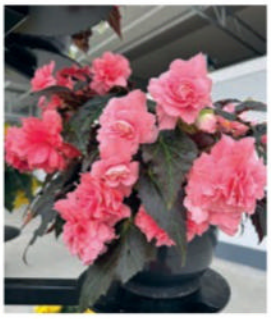
Benary revolutionised begonias with the introduction of their classic Non-Stop Series, which does exactly that, flowering all through the summer. Before this, begonias were more grown for exhibition purposes, not really as a casual bedding plant. One of the best colours is this two-tone 'Flame', which really echoes the apricot shade tones, which I think must be the best-selling begonia colour in the UK.



Stonehedge Series

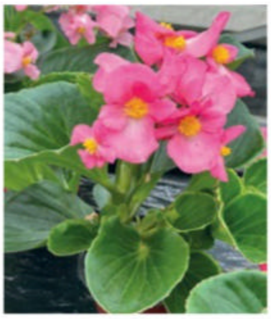
A super-clever name, for a super-giant begonia. You can expect plants that are more than 1.2m (4ft) tall, with giant black leaves and the most lovely bright pink flowers.

This can be used for landscape bedding, as you won't need many of them to go round. An excellent performing plant, with a striking impact. Last year I tested a few out as houseplants and they really looked great.



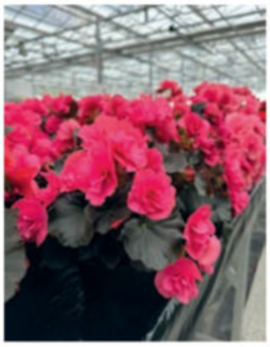
Non-Stop Mocca

That fantastic Mocca Series got even better with the addition of these black leaf types, which are the closest to a designer plant that begonias can get. They look particularly good when blended with gorgeous foliage plants, or even ornamental grasses.



Mega Cool Series

This is a *B. semperflorens*-type begonia, a vast improvement on the original types, which I think never really gave that much impact when flowering because the plants often stayed too compact and shy. This amazing series has leaves like water lilies, and big clear flowers that are incredibly weatherproof and can be grown in sun or shade.



Solenia Series

You can see that this is closely related to the houseplant types of begonia, from the *Begonia elatior* family. Yet Solenia is incredibly different, as it can be grown outdoors, and will also cope with more sun than regular begonias, which makes it incredibly versatile. Oh, and did I mention the five months of flowers??

mrplantgeek.substack.com

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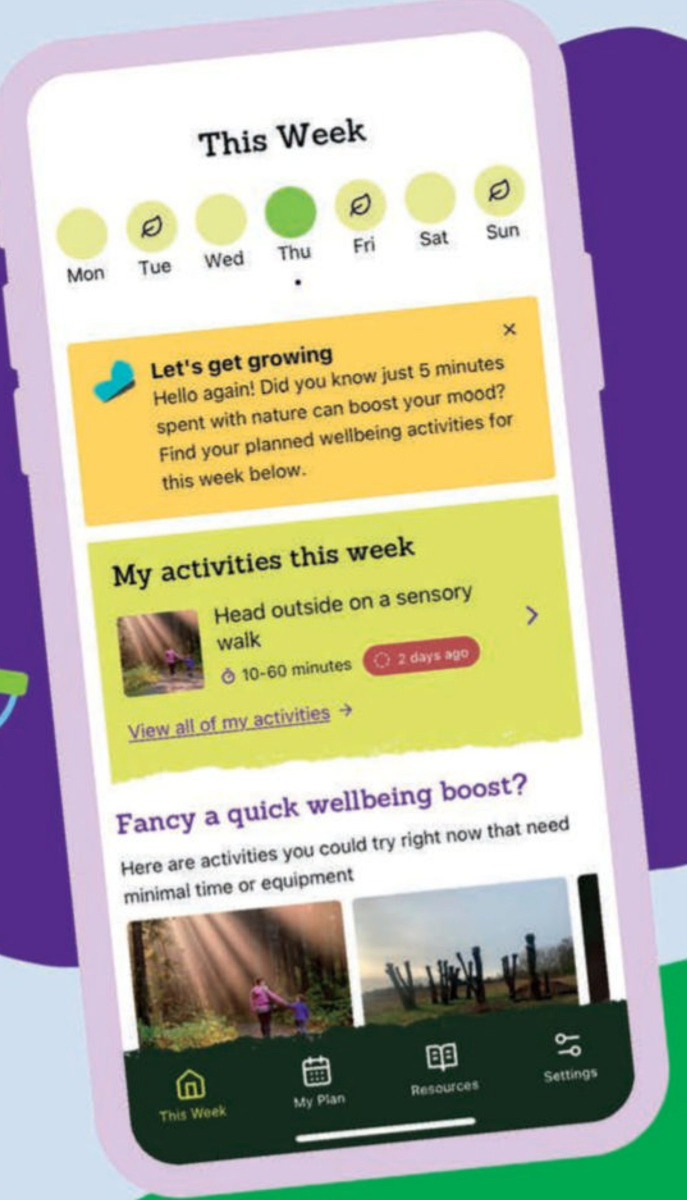

This Week

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My activities this week

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TOBY'S TALKING
NATURAL THINKING

A blackbird's song at dusk and dawn is one of the most evocative sounds of summer

4 ways to encourage garden birds

Toby shares ideas from the charity Song Bird Survival to help create attractive habitats for feathered friends

All images unless otherwise credited: Shutterstock

Units of measurement have to be based on something - an acre equates to the amount of land that a team of oxen can plough in a day while a 'cow's grass' - is the area of land that a single cow requires to survive.

Obviously, variations in soil quality and rainfall make this Irish measurement extremely variable, as up on a moor the area a cow needs is much bigger than in a fertile valley, so like the cow, the measurement is a moveable feast.

In our modern world, such variation is frowned upon, which is why metric, a system of weights and measures fixed to water, is king. You're probably aware that a cubic centimetre of water weighs a gram and a line of a hundred centimetres makes a metre, so it'll come as no surprise then that one million cubic centimetres of water make a cubic metre - a body of water that weighs one tonne.

© Song Bird Survival

The Song Bird Survival Garden at RHS Chelsea Flower Show this year

Waking the path of traditional measurements

Although accurate and cleverly interconnected, I still prefer to use the older measurements when marking out a garden. I'm not talking 'oxen acres' here but 'feet', as paths, borders, you-name-it in feet-based dimensions always look more 'human' in scale. And they would being as 'foot' is based on the length of, you've guessed it - a human foot.

I'm not alone in thinking this either... I've just returned from the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, where the best-looking gold-winning designs all had paths/features measured in imperial sizes.

Baby birds, like these sparrows, are vulnerable to predators above and below

© Toby Buckland

One of the bird-friendly areas of Toby's garden

You might find this hard to believe as there's only a small difference between a path that's three feet and one metre wide (86mm to be precise) but the first looks elegant while the latter looks clunky as it's too big for one person to walk but not quite broad enough for two. For that you need a path that's four or even five foot wide (just sayin').

Bird-friendly design

I mention this because there was one garden that bucked the imperial trend as the dimensions and layout were based on how songbirds interact and use our gardens.

Sponsored by the charity Song Bird Survival and designed by Nicola Oakey, the small garden contained all the elements of a nature reserve, including cover for birds to roost and nest, plus plants for food, and it also looked very easy on the eye.

Above: Plants with thorns, such as roses, offer protection for birds

I don't know about in your garden but the birds in my garden have enjoyed the dry weather partly because the heat has allowed insect numbers to burgeon. And although I didn't deliberately design the garden for our feathered friends, I was pleased to see that it contained many of the elements that songbirds enjoy.

Predator protection

Birds might not recognise garden boundaries but they do use fences and trees planted around the edge of a garden as 'lookouts' where they can scope for predators before swooping to a feeder or birdbath.

Cats at ground level are an obvious threat so having clear space around a feeding station allows them to check the coast is clear before risking a landing.

Interestingly, I also learnt from the garden that songbirds are hard-wired to fear threats from above and after leaving a lookout prefer to fly close, or beneath, the canopy of shrubs where they're less vulnerable to swooping sparrowhawks.

All you have to do is plant a few taller shrubs next to, or where they arch over, an existing garden path and you can transform a walkway into a safe flight corridor.

Planting choices

Take care over the shrubs you choose as some are better for the birds than others. Thorny customers like roses and sea buckthorn and holly grow into living fortresses where cats don't stand a chance.

I have a berberis in my garden that thanks to its long but diffcult-to-see thorns, is particularly perilous to handle. Its barbs don't bother the robins and wrens though. They dive-bomb in and out of the canopy without a care.

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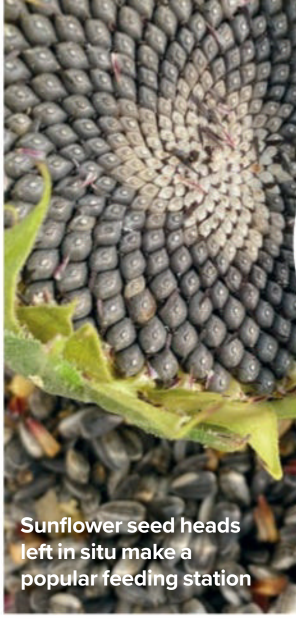


Sunflower seed heads left in situ make a popular feeding station

Teasels are an important food plant for goldfinches

The RHS Chelsea Flower Show garden also highlighted the importance of food plants, including shrub roses for hips and viburnum for berries, plus seed-producing flowers at ground level.

Red orach, cirsium thistles and scabious are all easy-going and colourful perennials that also feed pollinators when in flower.

Seed heads

In wilder areas teasel - a robust and easy-going biennial - is both a fantastic bee plant and brilliant for the production of protein-rich hoards of seed that are loved by finches.

Despite the number of birds that feast on my plants' seed, they never get them all, and my teasel patch always regenerates and spreads.

Another lovely innovation was the inclusion of a 'dead-hedge', made from sun-bleached seed-heads gathered and saved from the autumn. The dead-hedge was inside a timber frame with the stems arranged horizontally like strawy strata. Despite being little more than compost in waiting, the stems looked great and created an arrangement of nooks and crannies where insects would find shelter and feed wrens and robins.

I also liked the fact that the dead hedge reintroduced food gathered in the season of plenty, aka autumn, for the birds to feed on now and made a note to collect and store sunflower seed-heads from my own garden.

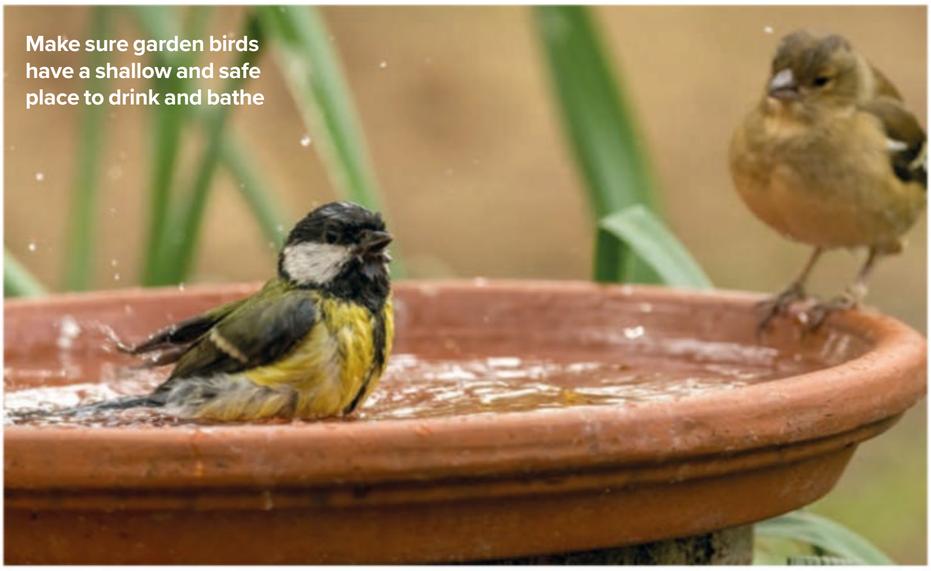
If the heads are dried and kept mouse-free through winter they can be strung from trees in spring and summer as home-grown bird-feeders.

Bird-friendly water sources

Where there's food there should be drink and at the centre of the garden was a bird bath-cum-pond. The water was deep but submerged stones created shallows so that both big and small birds could bath and dip a beak in safety.

Birds aren't just beautiful, they're vital for threir work of patrolling plants and reducing pest numbers.

So if you're designing or setting out your garden, remember to round up paths and borders to whole feet - it'll look a lot better, but don't forget to add food, lookouts and closer spaces for the birds. After all... they're more than feathered friends, they're a measure of a healthy garden eco-system.



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GARDEN MUSINGS

with **Bob Flowerdew**, long-standing *AG* contributor, broadcaster and all-round expert.

Natural pest control tips

Organic gardener **Bob** explains how he goes on night manoeuvres to protect plants

Our nights are short and warm, so I set my alarm and go out with a bright torch in the early hours of morning well before dawn. I do this with a tin or bucket in hand to drop in the enormous number of slugs and snails I'm about to catch in the act.

Yes, it has been better this year so far with the hot spring, but the first sign of wet and warm and these slippery interlopers will do untold damage if left longer in my garden, so maybe not as early as me, but do get out there and round them up. There were a lot of slugs last year, so there will have been a lot of eggs laid in the soil. I recommend rubber gloves for slugs as their mucus /slime is rather unpleasant and really hard to remove from your hands.

Now to the business at hand which we organic, nature-loving gardeners normally shy away from discussing. Namely, what to do with the potential plant eaters you have now removed. I've heard so many animated methods over the years and many of them rather cruel, slow and unpleasant. The thing is though, they do need removing so work with what you feel comfortable with, and help to ensure they don't return to destroy your precious plants.

Humanely remove garden pests but remember to leave some in the food system for predators

On the forage for other nocturnal nibblers

Have you had seedlings, especially beans or brassicas, fall over like a fallen tree cut through near the base? There are several soil-dwelling larvae that come up to do damage, and the worst of these are cutworms, basically caterpillars acting like mini-lumberjacks. So if you've had this issue, then grubs caught in your torchlight on the surface can be rounded up for removal.

Then there are the slaters and pill bugs, also known as woodlice, of which we have a great number of very similar species. All do some good as processors of dead material and they may eat other pests' eggs or young. So in balance they are fine and useful, however en masse they can cause issues, so if you have a large number, do consider moving some of them on.

Shaking off problems

Another noisome critter you may well run across are vine weevil adults, small bean-sized beetles with long snouts. These drop off plants if disturbed by light or shaking, making them hard to catch. If plants are suffering from notched leaves, put newspaper under them during the day then when you come round at night you can hear the weevils drop onto the paper where you can pick them up. You can use the same ploy with gooseberry sawfly caterpillars.

A moot point is earwigs, because undoubtedly these can be incredibly useful predators, but sometimes they develop into problems, especially on dahlias. Again, these hide by day so the night is when to catch and move them on when they can provide some use. Job done.

■ Don't forget that so-called pests are vital food sources for many predatory insects, birds and garden animals, so leave some in the food chain. Removal is only necessary when there are too many of one type of creature to help restore balance.

Above: Terracotta pots can be used to attract earwigs to places where you would like their help as natural pest control predators, or to tempt them for easy removal

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You can find out more about Bob via his website **www.bobflowerdew.com** and what's happening in his garden via Twitter (now X) **@FlowerdewBob**

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